

Student Learning Plans: Options for a Pilot Project in D.C.

Conducted by the Education Consortium for Research and Evaluation (EdCORE) for the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor

November 13, 2018



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Karen L. Williams, President
District of Columbia State Board of Education
441 Fourth Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Ms. Williams:

I am pleased to present this research report, ***Student Learning Plans: Options for a Pilot Project in D.C.***, prepared by the Education Consortium on Research and Evaluation (EdCORE). This is the final of several projects undertaken in response to the Board's January 17, 2018, resolution asking the Office of the D.C. Auditor (ODCA) to review concerns with school governance and achievement including "the criteria and standards that underlie high school graduation and examine school-level execution of these policies across all state-regulated LEAs."

In May, the Board endorsed the High School Graduation Requirements Task Force recommendation that personalized student learning plans be created for every public school student in the District. ODCA contracted with George Washington University's (EdCORE), a partnership with American Institutes for Research and Policy Studies Associates, to study issues and options on student learning plans as one strategy to support the Board and other public education policymakers grappling with the challenge of improving outcomes for the District's students.

The report presented here includes an overview of practices in other jurisdictions, and proposals for options for personalized student learning plans in D.C. schools based on team research and a range of interviews with District stakeholders, including parents, teachers and other school staff, and state and local education leaders. We also include an appendix with comments provided by the Board, and by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, the D.C. Public Schools, and the D.C. Public Charter School Board (PCSB) on a draft version of the report. Each major stakeholder supports the general direction of student learning plans, and we are grateful for the context these comments provide.

The final text notes that public charter schools may opt in to student learning initiatives and incorporates information regarding PCSB's use of a 9th grade on-track indicator in public charter high schools, as suggested in PCSB comments on the draft report.

ODCA presents this research report following the publication of:

- [A transcribed roundtable discussion](#) among past education officials and researchers on governance and other issues.
- [A survey of D.C. parents](#) on what they look for in a school and their view of the current lottery system.
- [A survey of DCPS principals](#) who share their challenges and concerns with stress, lack of budget autonomy and continuing pressures to promote students.
- [A comprehensive study of enrollment projections](#) for D.C. schools by a trio of expert consultants, at the request of the D.C. Council.

We hope this series of education reports are useful to the Mayor, the D.C. Council, and the public, as well as the specific education institutions who have commented on this report.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kathleen Patterson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kathleen Patterson
Auditor of the District of Columbia

Contents:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
INTRODUCTION	3
SECTION ONE – INFORMATION GATHERED	5
Student Learning Plans	5
Overview of Research and Lessons Learned	7
Section One Summary	15
SECTION TWO – PILOT PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION	16
An Approach to Pilot Project Development	16
Building on What’s Already There	19
Taking the First Steps	22
Options for a Pilot Project	26
Evaluation Plan Selection	32
Section Two Summary	33
CONCLUSION	34
REFERENCES	35
APPENDICES	39
AGENCY COMMENTS	46

On the cover: An excerpt from the Long Beach, Calif., College and Career Readiness Guide, sent twice a year to students and families.

Student Learning Plans

Options for a Pilot Project
in D.C.

The logo for EdCORE, featuring the text "EdCORE" in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters centered within a dark blue rectangular background.

EdCORE

Education Consortium On Research and Evaluation

Executive Summary

Across the nation, districts and schools are using individual student learning plans as a tool for educators to support, personalize, and track student learning and progress. In an era of multiple, ongoing student-centered school reform efforts, learning plans have become a common support that can be tailored to meet individual student needs.

Now, the District of Columbia is looking to use learning plans as an instrument to ensure that students remain on track to graduate prepared for their next steps into college and careers. The State Board of Education's High School Graduation Requirements Task Force, which included parents, teachers, and school and community leaders, is recommending the district-wide adoption of student learning plans, revisited at three critical transition points during elementary, middle, and high school. The Task Force recommends a learning plan pilot project begin during the 2019-20 school year with a possible expansion to other schools in following years.

The Education Consortium on Research and Evaluation (EdCORE) was commissioned to explore options for a learning plan pilot in DC schools. We reviewed evidence and lessons learned in states and districts across the nation; gathered stakeholder input through interviews and focus groups with OSSE leaders, DCPS and Public Charter School Board leaders, school leaders, teachers, and parents; and examined available technology platforms for web-based planning.

Student learning plans are used to meet multiple goals. Our analysis found that states, districts, and schools tended to implement student learning plans for objectives that fell into three categories of purpose, to:

1. Track student progress toward graduation,
2. Support college and career exploration and development, or
3. Inform personalized learning approaches in curriculum and instruction.

Individual learning plans are also used as a tool for parent communication, a vehicle to increase student agency, a system to share information across schools, and a platform to document strategies to help teachers and schools support particular student populations, such as students with disabilities and English language learners. Learning plans are ultimately at the service of students, families and educators.

Two clear themes repeatedly emerged from the evidence and experience of states and districts: first, successful learning plan initiatives begin with clarity and specificity of vision; and second, the process itself needs to be deliberative and inclusive. The success of a learning plan initiative begins with clearly defined goals and rests on effective stakeholder engagement and feedback throughout the design, implementation, and evaluation processes.

Based on the advice and lessons learned, we suggest a number of options for piloting student learning plans in DC schools. Each option can stand alone or be combined, depending on the goals of the pilot and the participation of schools.

Option 1: A Planning Year

Convene a year-long working group to incorporate feedback into program development and develop broad support from implementers.

Option 2: Track Student Progress

Recruit elementary, middle, and high schools to assess the effectiveness of learning plans at the three key student transitions identified by the Task Force.

Option 3: Test at a Single Grade Level

Pilot and assess learning plans for one specific grade level, then assess how the plans inform implementation at other grade levels.

Option 4: Test Grade Level Transitions

Consider a two-year pilot of learning plans following a cohort of students to test data-sharing between grade levels or schools.

Option 5: Integrate Multiple Student Plans

Focus the pilot on integrating multiple learning plans, especially for students with legally-

mandated plans, to test how each may align or support the other.

Option 6: Integrate Learning Plans and Other School Initiatives

Take advantage of existing initiatives to test how learning plans can be tailored to meet the specific goals of different efforts already serving DC students.

The national movement toward student-centered learning practices makes evident that learning plans will likely persist as a tool to support and track students along the path to graduation. To take the next steps toward implementation, District leaders will want to focus on specifying the purposes of learning plans and how they might best serve students, families, and schools. An OSSE-created and supported working group, of participants from across the District, pulled together to puzzle out a clear vision and process for learning plan implementation, would be the first step on this path.

Introduction

Individual student learning plans are used in schools throughout the country. They are a tool that educators use to support, personalize, and track student learning and progress. One kind of learning plan or another is required by over half of states and used in many more (National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2015). Plans are particularly prominent in middle schools and high schools, and often emphasize college and career development and tailored academic programs supporting students' postsecondary interests. In recent years, with growing attention to student-centered and personalized learning, student learning plans have become a tool for attending to students' individual academic and skill needs, encouraging students' agency over their learning, and communicating with parents. Learning plan proponents harness them as an instrument to increase student engagement, learning, graduation rates, and college and career readiness.

In the summer of 2017, the District of Columbia State Board of Education (SBOE) formed a High School Graduation Requirements Task Force to review and, as necessary, recommend changes to graduation requirements for all District of Columbia Public School (DCPS) students and public charter students. The Task Force was comprised of many voices—parents and teachers, a DCPS student, DCPS and public charter school administrators, SBOE members, an OSSE representative, DCPS and Public Charter School Board (PCSB) representatives, ward education group representatives, community and non-profit leaders, workforce development specialists, and higher education professionals. A year later, on May 16, 2018, the SBOE unanimously passed the

recommendations of the Graduation Requirements Task Force and put them forward to the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) for consideration as new policy (State Board of Education of the District of Columbia [SBOE], 2018).

The aim of the recommendations is to help ensure that more DC public school students graduate from high school ready for their next steps into college and careers. As part of that effort, the Task Force recommended the implementation of personalized student learning plans across the district. As formally stated, the recommendation is to:

Create a personalized learning plan for each public school student in the District, and revisit this plan in elementary, middle, and high school to ensure the student is on track to graduate.

The Task Force described personalized learning plans as a tool able to “bring families and school personnel together and align around how a student is performing and what can be done to ensure the student is successful” (SBOE, 2018). The goal, the Task Force stated, is to provide students greater control over their academic outcomes, involve families in conversations about data and student goals, identify and execute actions that will help increase student proficiency, and offer high-impact interventions to improve student outcomes.

To carry out this plan, the Task Force suggested that OSSE direct a pilot program of personalized learning plans in selected schools during the 2019-20 school year and then roll out the plans to more schools in subsequent years. The recommendations note that DCPS would oversee

plans for DCPS schools and PCSB would oversee plans for charter schools that opt to create them.

This report by the Education Consortium on Research and Evaluation (EdCORE) provides DC education leaders with information necessary to fulfill the recommendations. The key questions addressed are:

- What does evidence and experience suggest regarding the effective development and implementation of personalized learning plans at the school, district, and state levels?
- How might school leaders, teachers, counselors, parents/guardians, and students use personalized learning plans to ensure students are on track to graduate?
- How might DC implement personalized learning plans in selected pilot schools, evaluate and improve the pilot implementation, and expand implementation in future years?

To address these questions and learn more about how DC might pilot learning plans in local schools, we reviewed evidence and lessons learned in states and districts across the nation; gathered stakeholder input through interviews and focus groups with OSSE leaders, DCPS and Public Charter School Board leaders, school leaders, teachers, and parents; and examined available technology platforms for web-based planning.

The intent of this report is to provide DC leaders, particularly leaders at OSSE who are tasked with the next step, with information to guide their choices at key decision points in the

planning and development of a personalized learning plan pilot program. These decision points include choices regarding the vision and purposes of the learning plans; stakeholder contributions and partnerships; core elements of the plans; mandated and flexible school-level components; implementation models and timelines; and review and evaluation of plans.

As with any initiative, it is critical that the development of an ambitious idea like student learning plans be done in such a way that students, teachers, and families benefit. To that end, this report draws on guidance consistently offered in interviews and focus groups to focus a great deal more effort on the upfront design and communication efforts than is typical with education initiatives. Local educators and their peers in multiple districts and states around the country stressed the complexity of learning plan implementation and the amount of time needed to get it right. Sustained attention to the design process upfront, including the design of a rigorous evaluation of the pilot program, is essential. This report will provide options on design and evaluation to help guide DC leaders in that effort.

It is important to note that this report is not a research study. It does not test a theory or evaluate a program. Instead, our work gathers and arranges information and perspectives useful for decision making. The report raises considerations for learning plan development and is not exhaustive of available research or local ideas and input. There are more perspectives to hear and data to gather as education leaders consider implementing learning plans.

Section One – Information Gathered

This report compiles findings and lessons learned based on literature reviews and synopses of opinions expressed by various DC stakeholders and state and district leaders from around the country. We began reviewing existing research literature and reports on personalized learning plans, other types of student plans, and the key areas of research that have informed the development of these plans across the country. We concentrated much of this review on literature related to tracking student progress to graduation, the goal of the High School Graduation Requirements Task Force recommendation on student learning plans.

In addition, we conducted a series of semi-structured interviews and focus groups with parents, teachers, officials in DC’s education agencies—SBOE, OSSE, DCPS, PCSB, and DME—experts from local and national non-profit and advocacy organizations, and leaders in states and districts across the country. (See Appendix A for more information on interviews and focus groups.)

In these focus groups and interviews, we sought to incorporate diverse voices from across the city. We wanted to understand the potential and the challenges associated with learning plans from different perspectives, and to incorporate these ideas and concerns into our report. While our sample was intended to be more descriptive than representative, we paid special attention to the perspectives of stakeholders who have historically been underrepresented in decision-making. We spoke with non-profit and DCPS leaders about aligning learning plans with IEPs for students with disabilities and spoke with parents of students with special needs.

Student Learning Plans

Learning plans are essentially student profiles that include goals, strengths, skills, interests, weaknesses, possible education pathways, and educational gaps (Patrick, Kennedy, & Powell, 2013). Most often implemented in secondary schools, student learning plans are typically developed by engaging students in collaborative goal-setting with parents, teachers, and counselors. Plans can be directed by students even as they are continuously guided and encouraged by adults.

Learning plans are often called by different names. The Graduation Requirements Task Force used the term *Personalized Learning Plan*, a term also used by the U.S. Department of Education in a recent study on high schools (U.S. Department of Education [ED], 2017). Other research and reports refer to them as *Student Learning Plans*, *Personal Learning Plans*, *Individual Learning Plans*, *College and Career Readiness Plans*, or other names. In addition, for students with disabilities there is a legally-mandated *Individual Education Program*, or *IEP*. At times the names are used to designate a particular emphasis, such as the current national attention to personalized or differentiated learning, and at times names are used generically. As there is not yet a set naming pattern, we have chosen to use the more general term *Student Learning Plan* or just *Learning Plan*. The use of these general terms is not meant to alter the meaning and goals assigned to the effort by the Task Force but instead to distinguish between the use of learning plans to support “personalized learning” from use for other, possibly more general, goals.

Definition of Student Learning Plan

For this report, the term Student Learning Plan means a plan--often developed collaboratively with the student as a key stakeholder--that supports the identification of individual student goals (such as a student's career interests) or thresholds (such as the district-identified norms for attendance) and articulates strategies for staying on-track toward those short- or long-term goals.

Primary and Secondary Purposes

Across the country, student learning plans are used to meet multiple goals. Our analysis found that states, districts, and schools tended to implement student learning plans for one of three purposes, to:

- 1 Track student progress toward graduation,
- 2 Support college and career exploration and development, or
- 3 Inform personalized learning approaches in curriculum and instruction.

While learning plans are a tool used to meet more than one goal and thus can be crafted in myriad ways, school systems commonly highlight a primary purpose or direction for their use. As noted above, the High School Graduation Task Force recommends that the primary purpose of DC learning plans be to ensure that students are “on track to graduate.” Information in this report about other purposes is provided to help leaders consider additional uses in the near term or as interest or implementation develop over the coming years.

In addition to the three primary purposes identified, individual learning plans are used to serve other functions. They are used as a tool to

communicate with parents. They are used to strengthen student agency, or ownership, over learning. They are a means of sharing information across schools, particularly for transitioning or mobile students. And they document strategies to help teachers support particular student populations, such as students with disabilities and English language learners. As one DC State Board member said of their additional goals, they include “putting a process in place to facilitate conversations between teachers and families about student data ... opening up conversations, bringing families into the conversation, and letting students own their data.” The Board also suggested that plans are meant to facilitate conversations among teachers and between schools at transition points such as moving to middle school or moving among school districts. A few parents suggested that the learning plans can help teach parents how to advocate for their children. Each of these additional purposes can be included in the goals for implementing student learning plans.

Supporting Structures

Determining purpose is the key to getting student learning plans done right. The successful implementation of learning plan systems is dependent on that first large step. Yet, the plans themselves lack power without the necessary structural supports and interventions that respond to the plans and serve students. For example, using learning plans to measure and monitor student progress toward graduation benchmarks presumes that educators are able to follow up on that information and access resources to address off-track student needs. Likewise, planning processes that support career exploration or inform personalized learning require related school structures and activities to link the plans with career services or with differentiated instruction in classrooms. These follow-up efforts require design as well. And they may take considerable time to structure

effectively within schools because of their additional demand on time and resources.

Overview of Research and Lessons Learned

National Perspective

Learning plans are a nationally prominent strategy to improve student outcomes. They are increasingly popular and are a vital part of the national movement toward student-centered or personalized learning. A recent survey of high school administrators conducted by the U.S. Department of Education found that 65% of all high schools nationwide implemented individual learning plans, with an estimated 45% of all high school students developing a plan (ED, 2017). A 2017 analysis of state policies found that 32 states require individual or personalized learning plans through state statute (Education Commission of the States [ECS], 2017). Other reports lead us to estimate that nearly all states require or support *an element* of student learning plans in elementary or secondary school schools—for example, they may require student goal setting, academic planning, career exploration, learning style assessments or learning support determinations. Of the 32 states with required learning plans, 20 states specify that students take the lead in developing the plans, in collaboration with family and school staff, and 23 of the states require that it be done before ninth grade (ECS, 2017).

It is difficult to foresee this movement stopping in the coming years; in truth, the integration of technology in the classroom facilitates and has perhaps accelerated the movement by making possible greater individualized student learning. The recently reauthorized Every Student

Succeeds Act (ESSA) encourages this movement too. In a review of state strategies for personalized learning in ESSA plans, the national non-profit, KnowledgeWorks, found shifts to more personalized approaches to education and noted that each state plan includes personalized learning concepts, policies, or strategies (KnowledgeWorks, 2018).

Trends suggest that within the next 10 to 15 years all students will have individual learning plans. The spread of individualized learning provides an opportunity for DC to be deliberate in garnering practices and tools from other states and districts, and in shaping them to fit DC needs and context as the city develops its own practices.

Still, as noted in the U.S. Department of Education’s brief, there is little rigorous research on the impact of student learning plans (ED, 2017) to guide learning plan development. Most relevant literature provides guidance or lessons learned from state or district implementation. Because the plan alone is often a tool to support a number of different goals, the goals themselves (such as increasing personalized learning) are more commonly researched than the tools used to further the goals.

Notably, one study completed by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth suggests an association between learning plans and the positive markers of increased student motivation, sense of belonging and connection to school (Solberg, Wills, Redmond, & Skaff, 2014). A state evaluation of a two-year pilot program in New Jersey found that the majority of teachers and staff in pilot schools believed that the learning plans had a positive impact on students and shifted the way the schools addressed student development. A

Definition of Student Agency

Student agency refers to students becoming the active agent in their learning “through voice, and often a choice, in the process.” (Reese, n.d.) Agency implies intentionality in one’s actions. Intentional engagement in choosing and directing learning activities impacts a student’s perceptions of self-governance and resilience in managing her circumstances, which in turn impacts her engagement in learning. Increasing student agency appears to be an essential piece of the puzzle that leads to improved academic outcomes (Ferguson, Phillips, Rowley, Friedlander, 2015). Social cognitive theorist Albert Bandura of Stanford connected the personal control expressed in human agency to the development of cognitive capacity. Creation and control of one’s circumstances exercise and strengthen problem-solving skills, he noted (Bandura, 2001).

Harvard researchers connected gains in student agency to teacher behaviors in the classroom (Ferguson et al., 2015). Specifically, teachers in the study captivated student attention through lessons with clear objectives that encouraged and incorporated student voice. When observing these teacher qualities, researchers noted that students developed a “growth mindset” (Ferguson et al., 2015), exhibiting persistence, organization skills, attention to the quality of their work, wise use of time, and a focus on future aspirations. Yet student agency is not affected by the work of teachers alone. Rather, “it’s the product of a quality system – one designed as a high agency environment” (Vander Ark, 2015).

majority of the teachers and principals in those schools would recommend that colleagues consider the implementation of learning plans (Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, 2011). A local study in Vermont found that in a single middle school the implementation of learning plans altered teaching practices and encouraged a growth mindset among students as they set goals and reflected on their progress (Nagle & Taylor, 2016).

Nationally, learning plans implemented in high schools typically include information on postsecondary and career goals and the courses necessary to meet those goals. High-poverty and low-graduation rate schools are more likely to implement plans than low-poverty or high-graduation rate schools. At least half of high schools that developed plans targeted students based on poor academic performance, behavioral issues, or attendance issues. School counselors more commonly worked with students in developing student plans than did teachers, though the difference wasn’t large (ED, 2017).

While high schools largely focus on personalized learning or college and career readiness as the purpose behind their student learning plans, there is also a place for the use of these plans in supporting on-track indicators. The next section provides an overview of the use of on-track indicators and student learning plans.

Tracking Student Progress to Graduation

The aim of ensuring student progress from middle school to graduation led to the development of on-track indicators that would predict the likelihood of graduation at the critical ninth grade year (Allensworth & Easton, 2005; Allensworth & Easton, 2007). On the basis of these on-track indicators, multiple schools have

created early warning systems that identify off-track students, make explicit why they are off track, and then work to give them the support they need to get back on track.

Early warning systems are comprised of two parts: a system that tracks validated student indicators and a plan to get students back on track. Ensuring that students are on track to graduate is the primary aim of the Task Force recommendation, with plans revisited at three critical junctures: 1) in the early elementary grades as students advance from “learning to read to reading to learn,” 2) at the transition to middle school, and 3) at the transition to high school. This section describes research and perspectives on the use of indicators and early warning systems to track and support student progress.

The U.S. Department of Education estimates that early warning systems are used in over half of high schools across the country (ED, 2016). The most commonly used early warning systems monitor student progress at the transition to high school, from eighth to ninth grade. Seminal research by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research found that student engagement in ninth grade is critical: students who are “on track” for graduation at the end of ninth grade are nearly four times more likely to graduate than those who are “off track” (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). Based on that research, the Chicago Public Schools began in 2006 to collect measures of student attendance, behavior, and course grades – popularly known as the “ABCs” – to provide an early warning that students might be off track toward graduation. When validated indicators suggest that a student is off track, the student is flagged for interventions to help get back on track. The results have been dramatic: between 2007 and 2013, the on-track rate in Chicago Public

Schools rose from 57 percent to 82 percent (Roderick, Kelley-Kemple, Johnson, & Beechum, 2014), and between 2006 and 2016, the high school graduation rate rose from 57 percent to 74 percent (Nagaoka, Seeskin, & Coca, 2017).

DC’s public charter high schools include a 9th grade on-track indicator in their annual School Quality Reports. The indicator of school performance measures the percentage of 9th grade students earning sufficient credits to be on track for high school graduation within four years.

With the evident success of early warning systems in high schools, some school systems are beginning to research applications of ABC indicators in middle and elementary schools and additional indicators validated for post-secondary outcomes. Statewide systems in Minnesota and Wisconsin begin indicator reports in sixth grade, though they caution that the accuracy of the indicators is lower in sixth grade than in seventh through twelfth grades (O’Cummings, 2015). Wisconsin employs their College and Career Readiness Early Warning System, which uses validated indicators that suggest whether a student is prepared for the SAT and ACT and their likelihood of college enrollment (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). Massachusetts applies indicators to benchmarks in three-year increments from K-12 and into postsecondary education—namely, the transitions from “learning to read, reading to learn,” elementary to middle school, middle to high school, high school completion, and onto college enrollment (O’Cummings, 2015). In an effort to identify student disengagement throughout a student’s academic trajectory, Montgomery County (MD) Public Schools validated ABC indicators for students in grades 1, 3, 6, and 9 (Sapers, 2014; West, 2013).

The expanding applications of ABC indicators are echoed in the Task Force recommendations to begin learning plans in early elementary grades. One Task Force member mentioned that the idea of student learning plans emerged from a school representative's concern regarding "the disconnect between the data we have and the changes in practice and outcomes we see." A State Board of Education member said, "We can see in second grade that a student is off track, and then see that they don't graduate or they don't meet standards. And everyone seems shocked that this wasn't actionable."

Student learning plans are a tool that can be used as part of an early indicator system. The learning plan can record student performance on the ABC indicators as well as the strategies to respond to the data. This second benefit, of describing successful learning strategies or interventions, may be of the greatest value. Depending on local validation, the learning plan can contain a student's attendance records, academic record (GPA and course grades), accumulated credits, assessment test results, behavior record, special education and English language learner status, school changes, migrant status, and demographic information (Allensworth, 2013; O'Cummings, 2015). Some systems, such as Chicago Public Schools or the local Two Rivers Public Charter Academy, "red flag" students when data indicates that they are off track. Others, like the system in Wisconsin, use data to provide a scaled rating for how likely students are to graduate high school within four years.

In DC, a foundation on which to build learning plans that track student progress exists. In 2014, Raise DC, as part of the Graduation Pathways Project, identified eighth grade indicators across public and charter schools that predicted a student's likelihood to graduate on time. These locally-validated indicators include eighth grade performance on the old DC CAS, suspensions, absences, course failures, special education, and

English proficiency status. Raise DC's work led to the 2016 launch of the Bridge to High School Data Exchange, which supports students in their transition to high school. OSSE and participating LEAs securely transmit eighth-grade data among LEAs with participating high schools. The receiving LEAs then share that eighth-grade data with their high schools. In the 2018-19 school year, 95% of eligible middle and high school campuses participated in the Data Exchange. As a DC leader described, the goal of the Data Exchange is to address the issue of losing connection with students' needs over important transition periods with a focus at this point on the transition from middle to high school.

Research and reports on early warning systems highlight elements of effective systems. Most critical is accurate and accessible student data. The indicators chosen must be validated to show that they predict an outcome of interest, commonly high school graduation. Validating indicators is a time-intensive process requiring ongoing data collection and analysis to determine locally relevant measures and their cut points. This ensures that indicators appropriately identify off-track students without over-identification, which preserves district resources as interventions target students most in need. Reducing initial implementation costs, some states pilot their systems using Chicago's indicators before doing local data analysis (O'Cummings, 2015).

There is a note of caution to consider in using indicators in early grades. A couple of states that use early indicators in middle and elementary schools recommend that the student risk factors be interpreted alongside local data to understand underlying causes, and that decision-making authority on identification and intervention be given to individual schools (O'Cummings & Therriault, 2015). Similarly, an evaluation of New Jersey's pilot program found that there

were mixed opinions within schools about the appropriateness of implementing learning plans in middle schools, as some staff thought the students too young to benefit (Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, 2011). In piloting and implementing their early warning system, Wisconsin presented schools with individual student risk scores that included a margin of error; school leaders reviewed the state's recommendations, but had leverage to decide whether the data warranted the implementation of supportive interventions given local factors not considered by the system (O'Cummings, 2015).

Critics of early warning systems voice concerns that tracking student indicators, especially from early elementary grades, may lead to tracking of students themselves. They point to concerns that, since learning plans may contain indicators of poor performance or behavior, the information could follow students from grade to grade and bias how subsequent teachers interact with these students. Similar concerns were voiced by DC stakeholders: parents, teachers, and school leaders. One parent cautioned consideration of "whether or not the plan tracks kids." She worried that the plan "would follow them through the years and limit their opportunity." However, proponents defend the use of validated student indicators as reshaping the approach to interventions and informing actions to get students on track (Allensworth, 2013). In either case, it is a caution to consider.

Reporting frequency is another important consideration. The frequency of reports may depend on how schools identify goals, collect data, and devote resources to student interventions. In Chicago, the district reports data to schools after the first quarter of the year and then on a weekly basis going forward so that schools can implement interventions as soon as students are identified as off track (Allensworth, 2013). Wisconsin issues bi-annual reports in

Long Beach's Readiness Guide

Long Beach Unified School District created a college-readiness report for students and families that shows student progress toward meeting the requirements of California's colleges and universities. It also provides individualized guidance on course selection at each secondary grade level. The plans are described by the district as an equity driver, encouraging students to prepare for college and career without separating technical skills and career preparation from academic and college preparation courses. The [Long Beach College and Career Readiness Guide](#) sends information to students and families twice a year.

August and April for every student, specifying whether each student has a low, moderate, or high risk of graduating late or dropping out (O'Cummings, 2015; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.).

Preparing for College and Career

When used as a tool to support college and career preparation, student learning plans place less emphasis on using indicator data as an early warning trigger and more emphasis on forward-looking planning such as determining coursework toward high school graduation, exploring career interests, or developing postsecondary plans for college or careers. A number of states have named these types of learning plans "college and career academic plans."

At the simplest level, a college and career academic plan sets out a series of standard benchmarks that create checkpoints for a student's progress toward fulfilling coursework and other requirements for graduation. Even if

not customized for a student's personal pathway and interests, these check-in points may increase student engagement. Researchers note that plans that incorporate clear college and career elements enhance student engagement and motivation, especially when those plans are put into use prior to students entering high school (Quint & Plimpton, 2002). Some states, such as Arizona, make the link between K-12 and postsecondary explicit by including progress towards college admissions requirements part of the learning plans (ECS, 2017). Long Beach (CA) Unified School District plans include similar information (See sidebar).

Using learning plans to set graduation and postsecondary goals, and to track personal progress along the way, develops student agency. Students are given the tools to set meaningful learning goals and make choices about their education pathways, in collaboration with parents, teachers, or counselors. They construct individual education pathways that backward map from their chosen goals. For example, based on whether a student plans to attend a four-year college or pursue career training, the path might consist of advanced coursework to meet college requirements or exploration of work interests through internships, job shadowing, or employment opportunities. In high school, a student can develop a learning plan that includes a portfolio of work to be available for use in a college or job application. In Colorado, guidance counselors oversee twelfth-grade plans to ensure requirements are met and that each student leaves high school with a plan.

College- and career-focused learning plans can be tailored to fit different grade level needs. In Indiana, for example, students in grades 2-5 engage in "career awareness" activities, then shift to "career exploration" in grades 6-8, and then in later grades turn to "purposeful activities" such as formal coursework on career

Colorado's Career and Academic Plans

Colorado's Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP) initially focused on sixth and ninth grade lessons and touchpoints. As competency-based graduation requirements evolved as another priority, ICAP's career capstone project was used as a method for demonstrating students' career readiness. The next section of this report, Informing Instruction Content and Implementation, contains more information on options for personalizing learning using student learning plans. (See Appendix C for more information on Colorado's ICAP.)

exploration and preparation, working with career counselors, or engaging in career exploration activities such as career interest assessments.

Utah also includes students in career-related planning from the early grades on through high school graduation (see sidebar). A web-based platform for college and career readiness plans can facilitate sharing information from secondary to postsecondary settings. In Vermont, one of the web-based providers makes it possible for students to take "ownership" of their portfolio and continue to curate it after high school. (See Appendix C for more information on Vermont's Flexible Pathways to Graduation.)

College exploration similarly can be tailored to meet the needs of younger or older students. In Iowa, the transition is described as from "postsecondary exploration" to "postsecondary decision." Students can explore postsecondary education options by attending college fairs or campus visits, and later complete postsecondary admission requirements by taking college entrance exams, submitting financial aid documentation, or reviewing and comparing

award letters from different institutions (ECS,

Utah's College and Career Ready Plans

Utah's legislation requires age-appropriate college and career readiness content and structures for students starting in elementary school. Guidance counselors in early years provide supports, but the teachers who spend all day with the students lead the conversation. With the younger students, conversations focus on developing the "soft skills" that will support them in school and in later careers and in developing career literacy. Programming for these meetings becomes more formal as students get older, and guidance counselors support students in middle and high schools as they take ownership in developing a four-year plan that is revisited each year and eventually extends beyond high school graduation to incorporate the next steps in career training. (See Appendix C for more information on Utah's College and Career Readiness Plans.)

2017).

DC teachers indicated that some students in lower grades don't have a full understanding of the high school selection process in DC and how that may fit with their college, career, and coursework plans. Student plans tailored to support career planning may support those students and families by providing tailored, specific information about high school options earlier in the process. Other teachers noted that certain schools already dedicate class time, training resources, and staff positions to help middle school students connect with and plan for high schools.

An example of a local school system that does this is KIPP DC. KIPP DC focuses on secondary and postsecondary outcomes through a host of supports directed by the KIPP Through College and Career team. Staff work with families of middle school students and alumni to select local high schools, prepare students for college selection, host pre-college workshops, and encourage students to develop a Career Readiness Plan.

In some circumstances, such as in Vermont, the focus on career exploration and career-based and real-world opportunities to demonstrate competencies includes a rethinking of career and technical education. Student plans that incorporate career preparation and other student data into a cohesive plan offer an opportunity to streamline resources and eliminate the silos that often surround individual services.

Informing Instruction for Personalized Learning

The third category of student learning plan purposes focuses on using the tool to support personalization in curriculum and instruction. Personalized, or differentiated, learning tailors instruction to individual student needs, goals, or learning styles. Learning plans then are intended to identify and plan for varied student needs, thereby shaping the curricular pacing, materials, and assessments in the classroom (CompetencyWorks, 2018; Patrick et al., 2013). In contrast to a learning plan that guides college and career readiness, a plan used to inform instruction goes deeply into the content that a student needs to learn and master.

Personalizing instruction offers students multiple pathways to graduation. Personalization can be implemented through a variety of educational approaches, such as online and blended learning, dual enrollment, early college high schools, project-based and community-

based learning, credit recovery, or others. These personalized approaches organize curricula around learning objectives for students, supporting greater flexibility in the classroom or provide individual pathways through school. These learning plans give structure to individualized paths by making explicit student learning styles, interests, and challenges. Such plans may contain student learner profiles, career interests, pathways through coursework, and ABC indicators.

Competency-based education (also known as standards-based, mastery-based, performance-based, or proficiency-based education) is often a central component to individualizing instruction. Student learning plans can be a tool to support the structure of competency-based education by specifying the goals of instruction, where students are in the trajectory toward mastery, and what they need to do to reach their end point.

A study by RAND conducted during the 2014-15 school year looked at the impacts of using personalized learning programs on student achievement (Pane et al., 2017). With funding from Next Generation Learning Challenges, the 32 schools in the study implemented competency-based education, flexible pathways, and learning plans that contained student learner profiles. The researchers found small, positive gains in student achievement. A follow-up review saw more mixed results.

Schools that have implemented student learning plans to personalize instruction phase them in over multiple years. The first phase may require several years to pilot the learning plans, train staff, and develop new pedagogical strategies. In Rhode Island, schools are implementing student learning plans over five years, from 2016 to 2021, in order to give schools enough time to budget, train staff, and adjust practices. (See

Appendix C for more information about Rhode Island's Individualized Learning Plans.)

Long Beach Unified likewise gradually rolled out implementation of personalized learning plans over four years (Zavadsky, 2016). New Hampshire, which replaced Carnegie units with a competency-based system of student promotion, piloted competency-based education in 27 high schools for six years before expanding the initiative statewide (Frost, 2016). Another state leader who is currently working to implement learning plans that support personalized pathways for students noted that their state is operating under a six to seven-year implementation plan, but she recommends planning 10-15 years ahead.

Despite the challenges to implementing personalized instruction, states across the country are moving in this direction. The prioritization by ESSA of meeting individual student needs further encourages all states to embrace various forms of personalized learning.

KnowledgeWorks' review of ESSA plans evidenced a range of approaches from online professional development networks to the transition to competency-based education.

Delaware is transitioning to accountability measures for schools by assessing student proficiency of learning objectives, student growth in the highest and lowest quartiles, and postsecondary student outcomes (KnowledgeWorks, 2018). Additionally, the Delaware plan includes commitments to flexible pathways for professional development and credentialing for school staff, as well as technical support and wrap-around services to support low-performing schools.

Rhode Island similarly created a school accountability system based on evidence of student proficiency and growth, individual school report cards, and community feedback

(KnowledgeWorks, 2018). A learning plan to support these kinds of personalization may include information on the ABC indicators, flexible student pathways in career and college planning, measures of social-emotional learning, and proficiency assessments.

Section One Summary

It is helpful to view student learning plans as tools. Their purpose is to meet one student learning goal or many goals. They are a two-part tool with both parts—the learning plan template and the process for completing and updating the template—necessary to realize their value. To view learning plans this way heightens the importance of clarifying their purpose and determining their vital support structures. They can, in general terms, be used to track student progress, support college and career exploration

and preparation, inform instruction and personalized learning, improve student agency, increase family communication and advocacy, or support students with special needs or risk factors. Or, they may be used to meet a combination of these aims.

In a District-wide learning plan system, plans that share core elements could vary across schools in the other elements included, by school or district choice. Key to supporting variation is clarity on those similar shared elements, clear aims and effective communication, particularly with parents.

Suggestions regarding the development and implementation of learning plans as an effective tool, no matter the purpose chosen, are presented below.

Section Two – Pilot Program Development and Implementation

The second section of this report uses the gathered research and conversation material to describe options for pilot program development and implementation. There are multiple design considerations to resolve before adopting learning plans. Learning plans can be used to support on-track indicator systems, college and career readiness planning, or personalized classroom learning. They can be developed to drive student ownership over their learning plans or to serve as a communication tool between schools and families. They can be created for secondary school students or include elementary school students. They can come with strict guidelines from officials or be left open to school-by-school decision making. They can be instituted as a short-term trial or placed on a long-term timeline. Each of these decisions and many more will determine the character and perhaps the ultimate success of a learning plan initiative. And each follows from the critical first decisions around the goals and purposes for learning plan use.

First, before focusing on goals and purposes, we share the gathered advice on an approach to getting the work done. Among the lessons of education reform is that how decision makers go about making decisions and implementing plans governs the support given to those plans from those tasked with implementing them. It also affects the sustainability of change. Tepid support can doom a pilot (Davidson & Bushel, 2011).

We summarize some local and non-local advice on getting the work done in the section below. We then lay out the questions to consider in a

development process followed by options for implementation. Finally, we describe evaluation methods for a possible pilot program.

An Approach to Pilot Project Development

Before considering development and implementation options, it is worth taking an overall look at approaches to getting the work done. If there is one clear theme that was repeated through our conversations with local and national educators as well as our read of implementation guidance, it is that the process itself needs to be deliberative and inclusive. One former state leader quoted the adage, “go slow to go fast” and then added a twist, “go slow to go right.” The advice on speed was related to improving sustainability and quality implementation in the long run. It was not about moving slowly through that design process but rather about doing it fully and not rushing to implementation. It emphasized the necessity of stakeholder engagement and deliberation during the front-end design.

Engaging Implementers

The recommended approach was described as a process inclusive of the many actors in the educational system, slower than expected at the beginning, and respectful of the many complexities surrounding new initiatives. As a leader from a state that has implemented learning plans explained, when the student learning plans were first included in state regulations 10 years ago, some schools were engaged and thoughtful while other schools

viewed the initiative as extra work and just marked the compliance check box. “Now,” she said, “going back to the beginning to implement well across the schools takes rethinking and a lot of staff capacity.” Looking back on a different state’s implementation, a district leader recognized their error: “We didn’t think early enough about including all stakeholder groups. We knew what the state wanted so we did all of this awesome work and during the roll-out we received a ton of questions from others not involved in the development process.” Moving more slowly in the early stages creates the time necessary to move beyond a general agreement on the outline to real clarity and support of the details, one leader advised.

Many respondents described the downsides of not engaging broad representation early on. In contrast, they also mentioned upsides that come with that determined engagement. As a school system leader described, designing a pilot program collectively creates opportunities for informal instruction and learning across groups. Another school leader explained, “Getting the end users—the teachers and counselors—involved in the process is critical. Consider early how to get them involved in a from-the-ground-up development process. Those teachers become your champions and are able to speak to the product and the usefulness as well as to the meaningful ways it could be implemented.” A teacher echoed the need for buy-in from teachers: “If the school and community identify the need, then we all buy in and it creates this successful cycle. But, if [the expectation] comes from above it just doesn’t happen.” This type of engagement also counters teacher concerns we heard that mandates from above imply their time and opinions aren’t being respected. As one DC teacher noted, “we don’t need any more mandates.”

Implementers include parents also. One of the components the Graduation Task Force

recommended is that learning plans include home-based opportunities and interventions that would support student progress. As one SBOE member explained, “parents are critical to the entire process, so that it is fully informed by them, and so that the tool is actually useful at home.” A tool designed with parents, and with the parental role as a substantive feature, encourages the plan to be used as a forward-looking tool: a tool that “helps families and teachers collectively reflect on the school year and the trajectory and performance of the student.”

Another board member raised the importance of parents knowing what the educational plans include so that they are aware of what they should be pushing for or asking of the system. “We’ve got to make sure,” he explained, “that it’s a two-way street and that parents know the options on the table, especially for those students who are behind.” Parents seconded this proposal. One parent suggested that the learning plan can become an advocacy and political tool for parents seeking better educational services for their children. Another parent of a child with a disability stated, “Parents need to be taught how to advocate for their kids.” A learning plan can become a self-advocacy tool for parents, and for students. It becomes another way, said a local education leader, for parents to know what is happening in their children’s school progression and to be able to advocate for their needs.

Approaching the work by engaging implementers increases the odds of long-term success and sustainability. In preparation for a first stage of decision making, OSSE could convene and support a working group process distinguished by collaborative work of co-designing, co-delivering and, through the evaluation process, co-validating a student learning plan system.

Determining Timelines

Learning plans appear as a simple tool but because they are used to support multiple purposes, they are surprisingly time-consuming to implement effectively. Individual schools or districts can perhaps design and implement on shorter timelines, but a system-wide implementation must take the time to ensure learning plans are a useful tool, not just another task.

Implementation of learning plans is a multi-year process in most states. Vermont currently plans its implementation of personalized learning plans and flexible pathways “six to seven years out.” Acknowledging that this is a radical shift in education policy, a Vermont state leader recommends DC leaders consider implementation timelines of 10 to 15 years, a time span supported by implementation research literature (Hall, 2001; Nagle, 2016).

However, the timeline itself is dependent upon what a state or district is already doing that may align with learning plans. “Prior to establishing a timeline, you may put out a survey to identify existing structures that you can build on,” advised one outside state leader. “For example, do schools have an online school information system that is pushing information to students and parents? You want to know if the building blocks are in place.” An understanding of these building blocks is essential to forecasting a timeline needed to build the system, a timeline that may be shorter if more building blocks are already in place.

State leaders with experience in student learning plan implementation consistently stressed the importance of setting aside, at a minimum, one year at the outset to ensure alignment of goals and guidance. Multiple state leaders described how their states had begun implementation of learning plans within the year following the passage of a mandate, only to sacrifice popular

buy-in once implementation efforts faltered due to diffuse goals or guidance. A DC leader explained, “timing matters but sequence is really important.” Her suggestion is to lay out a sequence of events that could happen but be agnostic about the timeline or give timelines that are in spans of numbers of months, not the months themselves.

To avoid learning plans becoming a burdensome compliance check for educators, efforts benefit from clearly defined best practices, alignments among complementary efforts, professional development opportunities, and incorporations of stakeholder feedback and evaluation findings. One state, nearly 10 years after the initial learning plan mandate, reworked their implementation efforts by launching a year-long statewide listening tour to capture stakeholder perspectives to incorporate in learning plan guidance. As previously stated, stakeholder buy-in is critical to sustainability.

A local leader recommended a six-to-10-month timeline for just the preparation phase of implementation. Without the accountability of a mandate, she notes, you need to take several months of messaging and “socializing this idea.” She exhorted, “lead with trust, relationships, and supports versus MOUs, executive orders, or legislation. Those things don’t seem like they work for us.” Establishing such relationships and trust in a District-wide effort implies time to build. “Maybe more realistic would be to have the core group identified by 2019 with the intent to begin piloting the following year. That seems achingly slow, but these are the opportunities where you can’t step out and do it poorly or no one will come back.”

Once the goals and guidance have been established, piloting of learning plans typically lasts one to two years. Colorado ran a one-year pilot for sixth and ninth grades. By contrast, a two-year pilot with a single cohort of students

could assess the communication process across student transitions. A long-term implementation could use a developmental approach that rolls out implementation to additional schools in its second and third years. This way, lessons learned from implementation and stakeholder feedback may be incorporated to improve the initiative. One state leader highlighted the value of gathering stakeholder feedback throughout the implementation process. Constant communications “helps to have people reflect that this is a long road, but you are moving along it.”

Conversations with local district efforts illuminate the aims that warrant a long-term approach. “Getting the document right is one victory. We would not be successful if this was our only focus. We want to get it right *and* figure out how to roll it out, implement it, monitor it, and train the right folks.”

Incentivizing Volunteers

There is great value in creating a “coalition of the willing.” In DC, so many initiatives are optional, not mandatory; as a state leader explained, “it’s the way things get done.” Each of the state or system-level leaders we talked with emphasized the strength in a voluntary coalition. “Change takes so much energy for the school,” one leader said that “finding a small group of really dedicated and really willing people is the better approach.” A former DCPS official, suggesting ways to increase the success of implementation, suggested incentives over compliance requirements: provide a really useful tool, encourage use through grants, provide solid training to teacher and counselors, or operate a learning group that has the chance for site visits or the opportunity to hear from experts.

Teachers too emphasized the value in a volunteer coalition. One spoke to the dynamics underlying that willingness: “In terms of getting

teachers on board, it requires teachers being invested philosophically and intellectually in the work.” Without that space to choose to invest, another teacher said, it becomes just another thing to do. In addition to what they are already doing with classroom-level initiatives, grade-level initiatives, and school-level initiatives, it is a heavy lift. A teacher had a pithy summation of the approach to take: “find a core group to lift the work.”

Building on What's Already There

Schools across the District are continually engaged in school reform and improvement. A number of system and school-based efforts to monitor student progress and manage student data were spurred by last year’s report that many students were graduating high school without having met graduation requirements. And more initiatives are on the way:

- OSSE’s new school report cards will be released this year.
- The Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) is putting forward cross-sector recommendations for serving at-risk students.
- DCPS is drafting a sophisticated graduation plan guide for all DCPS high school students.
- The SBOE’s High School Graduation Task Force recommended changes to District graduation requirements.

While the many ongoing efforts create complexity across the system, they also create opportunities to leverage the value of ongoing initiatives to support new learning plan activities.

For example, DCPS aims to have the graduation guides up and running before the next school year. The developing templates are meant to

facilitate individual student college and career readiness planning. If a learning plan pilot was to begin next fall, DCPS high schools might be ready partners. They will be establishing school-level processes to support new college and career readiness plans and might benefit from city-wide conversations, cross-school learning teams, and supports. At the same time, they would contribute ideas and experiences to the local knowledge base on student learning plans. Similarly, Friendship Academy schools hold student-led quarterly conference meetings with parents and teachers and are working to engage younger students in third and fourth grade in leading those conferences. Consideration of the many DC school reforms increases chances to leverage existing initiatives in service of learning plan implementation and decreases the possibility that the plans are at cross-purposes with similar efforts.

A second reason to attend to current efforts in DC is the concern that with an additional improvement practice “one more thing” is being added to already full principal and teacher school days. Frustration resulting from “initiative fatigue” is real, exacerbated by discordant and confusing reform efforts. Learning plans raise the possibility of aligning efforts at the student level and creating coherence out of multiple improvement activities. Because learning plans are a tool and not a reform, and because they record information in a single place while supporting

multiple aims, they have the potential to simplify the delivery of student supports and align instructional strategies. Rhode Island describes learning plans as the “centralizing backbone” to efforts regarding student planning and coordination, pathway options, course selection, and work-based learning opportunities. The learning plans are considered “a mechanism to build coherence for all of our college and career ready efforts.”

Seen as a tool for communication, a single student learning plan can convey to a student and the adults in that student’s life—both school-based staff and family members—the range of learning supports and educational opportunities available to address a student’s goals and needs. With appropriate levels of planning, preparation, resources, and ongoing support, learning plans can provide a platform for sharing actionable data and opportunities across stakeholder group instead of “another thing to do.”

In conversation with educators and leaders we noted examples across city schools of initiatives targeted to personalize learning and increase student graduation. Some of these initiatives are listed in the table below. The table does not present an exhaustive list but shows the variety of related efforts across the city and highlights the kinds of opportunities available for leveraging ongoing work and aligning efforts.

Table 1: Selected Examples of DC School Initiatives with Student Learning Plan Features

Activities	
Elementary Schools	Summit Learning at Truesdell Elementary provides a web-based personalized learning curriculum driven by student learning plans
	Flamboyan’s Effective Family Engagement model is used in dozens of elementary schools (and some middle and high schools) in the public and charter sectors
Middle Schools	Bridge to High School Data Exchange facilitates data sharing across middle and high schools and the public and charter sector
	Friendship Charter School’s Student-led Conferences start at 5 th grade and are part of a model that teaches student agency as students lead conferences each quarter
High Schools	College and Career Coordinators in National Academy Foundation Career Academies prepare students for postsecondary options
	Pathways Coordinators focus on supporting students most at-risk in comprehensive and alternative DCPS high schools
	DCPS’s High School Graduation Guide (forthcoming) will provide personalized secondary school progress and postsecondary information to students and families
	Opportunity Academies use Summit Learning to support self-directed learning through a web-based personalized learning platform
	PCSB’s School Quality Reports for public charter high schools include a 9 th grade on track indicator as a component of school performance
	Capital City Public Charter School’s learning expeditions support an in-depth senior year project, based on the Expeditionary Learning model, where students demonstrate mastery through projects and exhibitions
	Naviance is a student-focused platform that helps prepare students for college and career choices

Taking the First Steps

New ideas and development that are not well thought through are often called “half-baked” initiatives. These are the plans that are not “cooked” thoroughly and just won’t work. After considering an approach to getting the work done—setting that early tone of deliberation and engagement—the hard work of fully thinking through the process and baking the ideas until they are done begins. Based on the advice and lessons learned we suggest four development steps to complete before planning implementation:

- 1 Choose primary and secondary purposes for student learning plans,
- 2 Generate theories of action for each purpose,
- 3 Identify the measures of success, and
- 4 Consider the design details.

We provide more ideas and information on each step below.

Choose Primary and Secondary Purposes

The choice of a primary purpose for learning plans determines all actions going forward. If the purpose is to track and communicate student progress toward high school graduation, then the system ought to be established around transition points, benchmarks, indicators, and the application of resources to keep students on-track. Likewise, if the purpose is to position students for post-high school college and career choices, the system would build in college and career exploration mechanisms along with indicators of readiness to enter various post-secondary paths. One state leader overseeing personalized learning suggests that a district or school ask the question, “How do we want to enter this work?” Because there are multiple entry points, the largest upfront challenge is one of establishing a clear purpose and then building

processes to accomplish that specific goal. The High School Graduation Task Force suggested entering primarily through the door of on-track indicators.

Another way to consider defining a primary purpose is to ask, “What is the job to be done?” (Christensen, Hall, Dillon, & Duncan, 2016). This approach places emphasis on the *problem* that learning plans are expected to solve. The Task Force identified the overarching problem that “DC public school students are not ready for the next steps in college or careers when they graduate from high school.” This general statement suggests a direction, but learning plan developers will want to be more specific about the problems to be solved, and the tasks to be accomplished, in order to design learning plans that are effective in getting those jobs done. To follow one of the recommendations of the Task Force, the problem could be narrowed down to focus on current weaknesses in school-parent communication and thus the job of the learning plan tool would be to improve that communication channel. Describing the theory of action and identifying the metrics of success are two ways to move toward greater specificity around a purpose.

Generate Theories of Action

In order to increase the chances that a student learning plan system produces the results leaders expected, the system must be developed carefully from the start with the end in mind. Specifically, leaders should spell out a *theory of action* laying out how they believe the system should work. A theory of action describes the process by which a given set of policies and practices are expected to yield a set of outcomes (Argyris & Schon, 1974). Theories of action are usually presented as “if-then” statements; for example, “if we create X, then schools will take Y actions, and then student outcomes will improve.”

In the case of student learning plans, a general theory of action might state that, if DC creates a learning plan system, then students, parents, and educators will have important information about student progress, and then they will be able to provide individualized support to students, and then student performance and attainment will improve. These results will only happen if the system is designed carefully at the outset, however. The system must be crafted so that it produces the information that students, parents, and educators can use, and so that all of these actors are capable of using the information in ways that lead to genuine improvement.

If the choice is made to enter into the use of learning plans through the door of on-track indicators, the success of this approach rests on a theory of action that states that, if students who are off track toward graduation are identified early, and schools then provide them with effective services and supports, then the students will get back on track. Sketching out the theory raises questions about the problems—Are they about a lack of valid early indicators? Are they related to a lack of effective supports?—and highlights the next steps that would need to be taken to make the initiative a success.

In another example, developers could follow the Task Force suggestion to increase students' agency over their learning. This path rests on the theory that increased student agency increases student engagement, which in turn leads to increased learning and achievement. Therefore, learning plans and processes might be built to genuinely engage students in the process and hand them ownership over their plans. These characteristics would need to be purposely built into the planning.

Identify Measures of Success

As a general idea, the goal choice provides an initiative's direction, while the theories of action

and the metrics of success narrow that choice further and determine the detailed steps to follow. Deciding at the front end how to measure success at the back end increases the likelihood of success. As the saying goes, "what gets measured gets done." Consequently, poorly chosen metrics, or metrics added to the evaluation late in the process, alter activities and perhaps pull the initiative from its original purpose. One state leader advised that decision makers "have a really clear idea of what it is they want to measure" and warned against letting people add metrics that "move you out of the scope of the project." He suggested putting strong boundaries around the project in order to avoid complicated measurement designs that lead to "a lot of data that is very thin, with no depth." "Boundaries," he said, "make for good creativity."

Consider the Design Details

Although the design of a student learning plan system will evolve based on the evaluation of the pilot and feedback from users, officials should put in place a carefully crafted design from the outset. Depending on the purpose of the system and the capacity of leaders, there are numerous ways to design student learning plans. Officials need to make decisions about the core elements in order to ensure that the system reaches its goals. These elements include:

The indicators to be included.

A system intended to monitor whether students are on track to high school graduation, like that in Chicago, will collect and report indicators that have been validated to predict graduation. In the case of Chicago's system, data on attendance, behavior, and course grades are collected regularly. A system to help prepare students for college and careers might collect additional data to measure additional competencies necessary for college and career readiness, such as writing or mathematics skills or social and behavioral

skills like perseverance. A system to inform instruction might collect additional measures of student learning, such as work samples that demonstrate competency.

The technical infrastructure for the system.

In order to make the system easy to use, both for entering information and accessing it, the learning plan system should most likely be web-based. For such a system to be effective, OSSE needs to ensure that there is sufficient storage capacity for the data, and human capacity to maintain the system and respond to inevitable glitches. At the same time, it is essential to establish firewalls and other security measures to ensure that the data remain private. Any security breach would be extremely harmful.

The human infrastructure for the system.

Effective learning plans require coordinated efforts by many people. In addition to teachers, counselors and the principal are directly involved in the development and use of learning plans; in some states, such as Colorado, Rhode Island, and Utah, counselors take the lead in implementing and evaluating the plans. Parents and students play key roles in setting learning goals. OSSE staff is responsible for maintaining the system. Professional development around the use of learning plans as a tool to support student learning is essential; otherwise, the online tools become about compliance, and often students find them burdensome (Rhode Island Kids Count & Young Voices, 2017).

Public support for the system.

Relatedly, OSSE should develop a public information plan for educators and parents so that they are aware of the system and its potential benefits. Above all, the plan should emphasize that the goal is to improve student learning and that the system will not be used to label students or track them into dead-end pathways.

A structure for the system.

Learning plans include both the plans themselves and the processes of completing the plans and then using them to reach specific goals. Consequently, they require a substantive supporting structure—a web-based platform, management structures, reporting mechanisms (even if reporting is done just at the school level), data security plans, student and parent meeting time, communications strategies to reach stakeholders, and importantly, the infrastructure and supports to deliver services to students. Each of these activities requires time and resources. For example, a DC teacher thinking about implementation asked detailed question about resources, “What if the students want something and you can’t offer that? How would you honor that need if you don’t have the resources to support that?” Her question speaks to the delivery challenge and the complexity of getting the job done. Doubling down on the process of determining up front the goals and theories makes it more likely to take the right next steps.

Data security.

Privacy and security must be an integral part of planning a pilot involving any student information. In the case of an individualized learning plan, the data involved could be especially sensitive. Whether the system incorporates test scores, course grades, student work, family contact information, or teacher notes, security is paramount. Some systems, such as Rhode Island, allow schools and districts to use a paper template for creating student plans. This method could provide more access for families lacking internet or technology access, and limit the possibility of a remote data breach that exposes identifiable student information. However, an online system provides more opportunities for real-time data sharing, quick communication, and storing of different types of data. In systems that use this

type of online platform, parents might receive information on data security and students' privacy at registration and provide active consent for participation at that time. However, the schools would need to consider what alternatives might be required for families who declined to provide consent.

Serving Underserved Student Populations.

Because many underserved populations—students with disabilities, English language learners, foster children, and others—already have educational plans, learning plans must be designed carefully so that the plans are in harmony (See sidebar on Serving Underserved Student Populations).

Serving Underserved Student Populations

While student learning plans might be new, schools already develop and implement many plans for students, especially those who are typically underserved. There are IEPs and 504 Plans, language development and health plans, behavior and discipline plans, transportation plans for foster youth, and others. Each serves a unique purpose and is necessary. Since underserved students typically have specialized school plans, and sometimes more than one, the use of a more general student learning plan has the potential to align learning and services to meet their needs, and, in the language of the National Center for Learning Disabilities, help students become the “agents of their own success” (National Center for Learning Disabilities [NCLD], 2018).

The work of developing student learning plans in these situations is that of integration and access. As one leader from Vermont put it, “There are a ton of plans and the learning plan has to consider what the interplay is among those plans.” The process of design and implementation also has to consider the differences among the plans. The Vermont Agency of Education explains how IEPs and student plans differ:

Personalized Learning Plans articulate the learning experiences that ultimately shape a student's path to graduation, in accordance with locally developed graduation requirements. IEPs outline the specialized

instruction and services needed to help a student with a disability access and progress in the general education curriculum. (NCLD, n.d.)

In a few states, such as New Mexico, IEPs may take the place of student learning plans entirely, but in many other cases the IEPs and learning plans are designed to complement each other with specific practices in place to ensure alignment (ECS, 2017). Some states have used student learning plans to improve the process of developing and implementing IEPs (Phillips et al., 2000). One study found increased parental engagement and improved communication between parents and students when student learning plans are used as supplemental tools alongside IEPs for students with disabilities (Phillips et al., 2000). Individual learning plans help build a bridge between the IEP and content-area standards, while also moving students with disabilities toward proficiency.

The IEP process can also be enhanced by an integration with personalized learning plans. As the National Council of Learning Disabilities suggests, a “strength-based IEP” that is much like a student learning plan can bring students more fully into the IEP conversation and use their strengths and interests to meet their goals.

Although the body of research on learning plans with ELLs is small, there is some evidence that learning plans connect instructional approaches

with personalized learning to bridge the gap between students' lives and classroom experiences (Johnson & Johnson, 2016). Individual learning plans are an extension of personalized learning, which can be especially helpful for these special populations.

Learning plans can support student transitions and transfers from one school to another as part of a normal feeder pattern (such as moving from an elementary to a middle school), mid-year transfers within a single district, or mobility across multiple districts. This is particularly important in Washington, DC, with 68 LEAs and frequent movement among them.

In addition, some states use student learning plans to connect with agencies and organizations outside of schools. For students in contact with the juvenile justice system, family service providers, or other organizations, these plans could be constructed to provide safe, curated access to data-sharing for different stakeholders

and service providers. "I can't share an IEP with an outside vendor that's being paid to run an afterschool club," said a DC parent, "but I can share a learning plan."

Accessibility is a key concern when designing learning plans to serve students who are English language learners, identified with a disability, mobile, homeless, in a foster setting or otherwise may struggle to access technology or school resources. Addressing barriers to access for students and families is a critical piece of the design process. In particular, accessible technology is a challenge. The technology necessary to participate in shared platforms can be a barrier for families' participation in the learning plan process, though principals or other school-based support individuals can help mitigate these barriers (Taylor, 2016). Having a school-level advocate and liaison might help identify and resolve barriers to access.

Options for a Pilot Project

Simply put, a program pilot is a trial run. A pilot helps test everything from the vision and theory of action animating the program to the actions of completing a learning plan and meeting with families. A pilot tests the key decision points and activities in the process. A well-considered pilot program has the advantages of revealing the challenges of implementation, gathering feedback from different players in the process, understanding the demands on time and resources, testing the monitoring and evaluation plans, and spreading the word about the value of a learning plan initiative (National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, n.d.).

Ideally, a pilot program is constructed as an iterative process of implementation and improvement. That is, a cycle of implementing a clear vision, testing results based on well-considered criteria, and then adjusting or altering the program to improve results in the next cycle. This cycle of iterative improvement lends itself to the development and implementation of effective learning plans in DC schools. Without a system-wide learning plan program to test or an outside program that will be "scaled up" here in DC, a typical program evaluation that just measures program success or failure isn't a good fit. Early planning of a meaningful evaluation, however, is the key to making a pilot program valuable.

Here are common steps in setting up a pilot program and evaluation:

- 1 Establish a working group
- 2 Create practices for stakeholder contributions and partnerships
- 3 Set a clear vision and purpose
- 4 Determine core elements, including the common or flexible school-level components
- 5 Choose pilot sites
- 6 Train implementers
- 7 Decide timelines
- 8 Provide ongoing resources and support
- 9 Evaluate pilot results
- 10 Make recommendations for improvement

Most of the steps listed above must be completed before a pilot program begins. They make up the heart of the development phase. In the section below, we lay out options for moving forward with a pilot project in DC schools. Each pilot option assumes that leaders have completed the following steps: engaged a working group of community partners invested in the project, assessed current services and programs across the District, set a clear vision and established core components, chosen pilot sites and trained staff, determined the timeline, and developed the evaluation criteria.

In some cases, learning plans can be used in a localized manner, as with a single teacher using learning plans to guide a year's worth of instruction in a single content area. More common is the use of learning plans across content areas and grades to facilitate data-sharing and alignment across a student's studies. Given the latter implementation, recruiting schools as the unit of implementation and requiring participation of all teachers within each school is likely the most useful option.

However, the pilot design could consider the possibility of piloting in schools where teacher buy-in is less than complete to avoid compulsory compliance that may lack fidelity of implementation and minimize the positive effects of learning plans. In some cases, starting with a small, engaged group of participants can be the correct place to start.

We want to raise two other key considerations from the discussion in the sections above: serving underserved students and securing student data. A valuable pilot program will include processes to support the learning of all students including English language learners, students with disabilities, youth in foster care or interacting with the juvenile justice system, homeless youth and other at-risk students. A pilot can test the alignment of new learning plans with ongoing efforts to support all students. And while a pilot tests new things, leaders will want to use tried and true processes for ensuring student privacy and securing data.

The High School Graduation Task Force initially identified learning plans as a tool for ensuring DC students are on track to graduate. This report has identified additional uses of learning plans, which could be combined with the Task Force's original intention: supporting college and career exploration and preparation, informing instruction and personalized learning, improving student agency, supporting family communication and advocacy, and supporting students with special needs or risk factors. We suggest options for pilots below, including an option to test the original Task Force recommended plan. Ultimately, a pilot program that best suits DC may pull from these ideas or combine them or even share common elements while supporting school-level variation. Those decisions will rest on the critical first decision about the purpose of student learning plans in DC schools.

Option 1: Planning Year before Pilot Project

Planning and Design: 10-14 months
Pilot Begins: Fall 2020

There are many reasons to consider a full planning year before launching a pilot project. An entire school year of planning and preparation gives project leaders a chance to seek authentic community input and build the broad engagement that is most likely to generate a thoughtful project design that will best serve all stakeholders. As a first step, the working group might conduct a listening tour to hear community needs and interests and discuss the many ways that the learning plan tool could meet those needs. The planning year could focus on understanding the many initiatives in local schools and how learning plans could be integrated with those improvement efforts. At the same time, the working group could learn what is effective and what isn't in related programs to inform the details of a pilot. In addition, the full planning year provides time for the important step of reflecting the information back to the community to affirm their input and build support for future implementation.

During the planning year, the working group could also design training and coaching for those who will implement the pilot. Ensuring the appropriate resources and supports are in place prior to implementation drastically reduces the chance that learning plans will become “one more thing” added to teachers’ workload or a “one and done” initiative not fully incorporated into school functions. One state pilot of personalized learning found that teachers enjoyed the coaching provided as part of the support plan. If thoughtfully considered and

aligned to existing work in the schools, these types of supports may even be an incentive for participation at the school level.

The planning year allows time to consider the different elements of a useful pilot program. Our team originally set out to identify the essential content elements for successful learning plans. Instead, our research demonstrated that those components must be tailored and customized based on the program’s leaders, the needs of schools and educators, and the objectives of the plans. A planning year gives the working group time to choose and tailor the template and platform for creating plans, the elements of the plans, the planning process, and touchpoints. It may be that the working group chooses to design a common learning plan platform with consistent content components used in all sites, or they may instead decide to design a pilot study around existing processes and consider options for scaling those initiatives. The extra time for design and planning will also allow for a nuanced conversation about the pilot’s objectives and strategies. Given the literature and experiences summarized in this report, the working group might choose to expand required touchpoints to a more frequent basis, incorporate strategies for accessing career exploration, or specifically target inter-school transitions by supporting data sharing among schools and districts.

A planning year could be added to any of the options below. For simplicity, however, each of the following options assumes a shorter planning time with implementation scheduled for the fall of 2019.

Option 2: Pilot Learning Plans that Track Student Progress

Planning and Design: 6-8 months
Pilot Begins: Fall 2019

The High School Graduation Task Force recommended that personalized learning plans track students' pathways to graduation and provide additional communication to families. Under this objective, learning plans would be designed with a focus on expected touchpoints at third grade (or one point between the second and fourth grades), fifth grade, and eighth grade. These recommended touchpoints line up with three key transition points in a student's career: moving from learning to read to reading to learn, transitioning from elementary to middle school, and transitioning from middle school to high school.

Given these touchpoints, the working group would recruit schools that serve one or more of these grade levels. In some instances, this could

be a feeder pattern of schools in a single LEA. The pilot could study and evaluate the components of the learning plans recommended by the Task Force—reading and math benchmarks, school-based and home-based interventions—at the different grade levels and determine which components are most valuable to students, families, and teachers.

Another key feature that will provide contrast between grade levels is the level of student agency in the development and ownership of learning plans. In the early grades, teachers will probably play the key role in developing learning plans, especially as students are less likely to have contact with a guidance counselor. The pilot evaluation might specifically test students' engagement with the planning process at different grade levels, so that a larger effort can provide appropriate supports and engage the correct adults at each stage.

Option 3: Pilot Learning Plans at a Single Grade Level

Planning and Design: 6-8 months
Pilot Begins: Fall 2019

This version of a pilot program is one of the simpler options, as it focuses on just one grade level rather than trying to implement learning plans across elementary, middle and high schools at the same time. Each grade level has unique needs and focusing the pilot implementation on only one grade level might allow the design to better serve those needs. However, there may be some learning plan components that, if implemented at one grade level successfully during the pilot, could be generalizable or may inform development of

activities in other grades if the program is scaled.

In essence, starting with a single grade level lessens the pilot complexity. A high school pilot in DCPS schools could take advantage of the forthcoming Graduation Guide and provide learning plan supports and a community of practice structure to support that roll out. In addition, implementing plans in high schools responds to DCPS's concern, as mentioned in the Task Force recommendations, that the infrastructure is not in place at the elementary grades to support learning plan systems.

Alternatively, the pilot could start in the early grades. One way to pilot elementary school

learning plans would be to build them around common reading early reading assessments. For example, the DIBELS assessment of early literacy skills is a benchmark test given multiple times a year and available to students in grades K-8. Learning plans could be built to support the communication of DIBELS results to families and students and to convey next steps for supporting student growth.

Or, a pilot could start in middle schools and use the advisory structure to complete plans and teach students the skills necessary to “own” their learning progress and strengthen their agency. In this instance, the advisory structure would be a focus of evaluation and adaptation to support student learning plans.

Option 4: Pilot Learning Plans that Test Grade Level Transitions

Planning and Design: 6-8 months
Pilot Begins: Fall 2019

One of the substantive challenges of effective learning plans is sharing data across classrooms and schools. A pilot program could be constructed as a *two-year effort* that would follow students from one grade level to the next and test how best to facilitate that data sharing. This could be done within feeder patterns of schools or test the application across the wider gulf among feeder patterns. The pilot could test transitions between grade levels, between schools, or even from secondary to postsecondary settings.

A two-year pilot could use the Task Force-recommended touchpoints and follow cohorts of students across the transitions from second to third grade, from fifth to sixth grade, or from eighth to ninth grade. The data management and

sharing structures could be purposely designed at the beginning, and tested, to facilitate the flow of information. A two-year pilot would also be able to measure differences between a first and second year of implementation and benefit from first-year lessons learned.

One strong pilot approach would be to integrate the learning plans with the ongoing work of the Bridge to High School Data Exchange, developed by OSSE and Raise DC along with school partners. The Data Exchange and Kid Talk initiatives share student-level information across schools and provide a platform for educator connections to better serve students transitioning schools from eighth grade to ninth grade. A learning plan pilot could be built around this ongoing effort and take advantage of the structures and data sharing processes already in place.

Option 5: Pilot Integration of Multiple Student Plans

Planning and Design: 6-8 months
Pilot Begins: Fall 2019

As a stand-alone pilot or a segment of a broader pilot, a program could explore and measure how best to align different types of student learning

plans. As described in a section earlier in this report, IEPs and student learning plans are similar but serve different goals. Similarly, there is overlap among 504 Plans or language development plans with student learning plans but there are also distinctive purposes. To pilot

the integration of multiple student plans, the working group would want to define the unique role of the student learning plan, perhaps as parallel to other plans or an addition to them. The group would also want to consider how to limit the burden on teachers and staff created by writing and updating more than one plan. And the working group would want to determine how best to work with students and parents in

conveying the information in two or more plans and updating them without doubling the effort required for managing a single plan.

It is useful to explore in a pilot program how legally-required plans could simultaneously serve the purposes of student learning plans, depending on the goals and mandated elements articulated by the Task Force.

Option 6: Pilot Integration of Learning Plans & Other School Initiatives

Planning and Design: 6-8 months
Pilot Begins: Fall 2019

Schools in DC are already implementing elements of early warning systems, college and career readiness programs and personalized learning. Most of these efforts are happening in individual schools or clusters rather than systemically. As described previously, learning plans are a tool that can support a number of different improvement efforts and may be designed to support successful initiatives already underway. A pilot could be designed to take advantage of existing efforts in order to see how learning plan contents and management functions can be tailored to meet the specific goals of different efforts already serving DC students.

For example, Summit Learning, a personalized learning platform and curriculum, is in place in DCPS Opportunity Academies and other public and charter schools. A pilot could test the value

of learning plans as a support to personalized learning under the Summit program. A comparison could be conducted across grade levels of the common and distinctive learning plan elements useful in integrating with that program.

The Flamboyant Foundation supports Family Engagement Partnerships in 55 schools in DC. Most of these schools are elementary and middle schools, however Flamboyant is piloting their family engagement practices at the high school level. The model supports school strategies to build trust and partnership with families—a critical characteristic of successful learning plan models—and aims to develop students' skills to lead traditional parent-teacher conferences. A pilot could test learning plan partnership with a structured family engagement process, such as the Flamboyant model, to learn how to best support that process.

Evaluation Plan Selection

A pilot evaluation tests the effectiveness of pilot activities against the goals. The evidence, emerging from practice, can be used to improve those activities over time. Data collection and evaluation are essential to learning from a pilot.

An evaluation can be structured to measure program performance, as in a summative assessment, or it can be designed to measure and support progress, as in a formative assessment. Uncertainty about learning plan goals and best practices supporting those plans led most respondents in our interviews and focus groups to suggest an iterative approach to evaluation. A pilot could begin with a formative-type research and development evaluation plan, with the understanding that with strong metrics in place, an analysis of program outcomes could also be conducted, either during the pilot or more realistically during the later, broader implementation.

The aim of iterative evaluation is to test the activities and the infrastructure supporting the activities and to learn from that knowledge in a process of iterative design and improvement. This type of Plan-Do-Study-Act model is organized around three questions:

- 1 What are we trying to accomplish?
- 2 What changes will be introduced?
- 3 How will we know a change is an improvement?

The questions encourage specificity around the vision, the activities and the metrics of success (Grunow, 2015). A few thoughtful and well-specified research questions guide the decisions on metrics, data collection processes and evaluation methods.

The benefits of a tight, bounded objective have already been discussed. But this narrow focus

can still incorporate multiple carefully aligned goals. Identifying the interrelatedness of the potential objectives and strategies can help the working group identify potential leading indicators for success to inform the pilot evaluation and learning design.

A learning plan evaluation can use quantitative and qualitative measures. Typically, in education research we look to long-term measures such as improved student outcomes, but implementation is improved more effectively by measuring interim benchmarks. On an ongoing basis, quantitative data could be collected to view progress, such as measures of learning plan uptake or number of plans updated each year. Qualitative data is often the most useful in pilot studies looking at how a new program or intervention is perceived, implemented, and used by different stakeholders. Surveys or interviews with school staff, and student or parent perspectives can provide information on learning plan value, challenges or burdens.

Either a one-year or a two-year implementation pilot will likely necessitate a focus on qualitative research-based leading indicators rather than quantitative measures of student outcomes. However, an extended timeline will allow for the continued working group process of leveraging interim findings and collaboration among pilot participants to learn and adapt the implementation in real time. If the pilot implementation could be extended further out, analysis of graduation outcomes and other student-level measures could be incorporated into a reliable analysis.

To ensure that the final process has maximum engagement and usefulness for all stakeholders, it will be important to gather rich data from diverse sources to generate a complete picture of the pilot implementation.

Section Two Summary

Input from District teachers, parents and leaders, along with advice from non-local state and district leaders, emphasized the importance of taking an inclusive and deliberate approach to building a student learning plan initiative. That approach would involve at the front end those who are tasked with implementing at the back end. It would also build on what is currently happening in schools to avoid adding that “one more thing” to educators’ plates. An OSSE-directed and supported working group, drawn from among a “coalition of the willing,” is

a necessary first step.

The specification of purposes for learning plans is key to their success, particularly at the pilot state. And one of the important purposes to consider, under any pilot scenario, is how student learning plans can be used in addition to or integrated with more specialized or legally-based plans to serve underserved student populations. The development of specific goals early on guides each step of implementation and supports a valuable evaluation.

Conclusion

Learning plans are a promising tool. They are also, in terms of implementation, a heavy lift. To implement them successfully and realize their value requires a great deal of planning, communication, time and resources.

Their versatility means they can be used in multiple ways. This feature may explain why they are so common in schools nationally even as the research base on their effectiveness in increasing student achievement is thin.

After a deep dive into understanding student learning plans, we appreciate their potential as a powerful tool to support education reform and improvement efforts in DC. Still, their ultimate value will be largely dependent on how they are designed and used. It will be well worth the upfront investment of time for education leaders to work with stakeholders across the city in determining how student learning plans can best serve DC's students, families, and schools.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Background on Information Gathering

The EdCORE team reviewed and summarized data and evidence related to student learning plan development and implementation, including effective practices and lessons learned from states and districts across the country. We spoke with leaders from six states including current leaders at the Utah State Board of Education, Vermont Agency of Education, Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Denver Public Schools, Tennessee Department of Education, and a former leader from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.

We also gathered perspectives on student learning plan purpose, content and delivery through interviews with government leaders from District of Columbia State Board of Education, Office of the State Superintendent, District of Columbia Public Schools, District of Columbia Public Charter School Board, Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education and from experts at non-profit organizations including KnowledgeWorks, Raise DC, Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE), EmpowerEd, Flamboyant Foundation, National Council of Learning Disabilities, and the Education Commission of the States.

Through three focus groups and additional interviews we talked with 13 DC public and charter school parents. With the support of EmpowerEd we held focus groups with 28 public and charter school teachers. We also spoke with leaders of Capital City Public Charter School and Friendship Public Charter School. As this project spanned the summer months when children were out of school, we did not have the opportunity to hold student focus groups and recommend that students be engaged in early stage designs of a student learning plan system.

Appendix B: Web-based Student Learning Plan Platforms

To guide students through their student learning plans, schools typically use web-based learning platforms to personalize and augment learning opportunities. Our team was charged with identifying available technology platforms and desirable features for potential web-based learning plan tools. Interviews with districts and states using web-based learning plan systems confirmed that the choice of platform is ideally driven by the project's objectives. Luckily, many of the platforms available are also capable of additions and customizations, so that a platform choice should not unnecessarily hinder evolving implementation. The pilot project working group will want to begin by considering which platforms currently used in DC schools might serve to support new learning plan systems, in addition to exploring other options.

[Aspen](#) is a platform for managing student data currently in use within DCPS. Aspen's platform includes options for storing both traditional and standards-based grading, and can allow families and students to access real-time feedback from teachers on assignments. Aspen also allows the integration of student medical data and interventions, which one parent focus group voiced as a compelling option.

[Naviance](#) was designed to help schools track college and career readiness factors, and is currently used in DCPS high schools. The platform creates a central place for students, families, teachers, and guidance counselors to collaborate on a student's college application packets or career exploration work. Students can create a coursework plan, college recommendation letters, or connect to platforms that provide career assessment surveys. Naviance is used by Colorado schools to track certain elements of their student learning plans.

[Summit Learning](#) is used by a number of DC public schools, including the Opportunity Academies, and charter schools. Access to the learning platform allows students to set goals and pursue self-paced content. Summit provides curricula, professional development, and coaching to schools using the personalized learning platform.

[AltSchool](#) is a platform designed to facilitate personalized learning. The system builds off a "portrait" of each student's academic and non-academic data and allows teachers to design units of study, assign personalized work tasks for each student, and share information with parents.

[Cortex](#) is a learning platform that allows student data management and personalized learning. The platform can track individual students' enrollment, assessment, and attendance data while providing teachers functionalities to set learning progressions aligned to Common Core content mastery.

[Echo](#) is a project-based learning platform. It allows teachers to track students' progress toward mastery of content or skills and create targeted syllabi for individual students. Students can search and identify learning resources tied to those content and skills.

[Richer Picture](#) allows students to design four-year pathways with customized course selections and exploration modules focusing on academics, college and career exploration, and personal and social skills. Advisory-style lesson plans are provided for teachers. Richer Picture is approved by Rhode Island to meet their learning plan regulations.

[Choice 360](#) by Xap is a college and career planning platform. Students can assess their own interests and skills, learn about different career options and outlooks, explore post-secondary education options, and plan their college application processes. Guidance counselors can access students' data created through the platform and coordinate learning experiences. Choice 360 is approved by Rhode Island to meet their learning plan regulations.

[Xello](#) is platform that allows students to explore career and college options and plan potential pathways to meet long-term goals. Student interest and skills assessments, goals, and coursework plans are combined in a portfolio that can be shared electronically or printed to guide conversations with teachers, guidance counselors, or families. Xello is approved as a tool for Rhode Island's student plans.

Appendix C: State Case Studies (Utah, Colorado, Vermont, Rhode Island)

Utah Case Study

Utah schools were encouraged to create student learning plans, originally called *Student Education and Occupation Plans*, as early as the 1980s. Direct funding for counseling programs to support related comprehensive guidance activities began in 1994. Today, *College and Career Readiness Plans* are in use across Utah secondary schools. The [state code](#) describes the plan requirements:

1. Each local school board, in consultation with school personnel, parents, and school community councils or similar entities shall establish policies to provide for the effective implementation of an individual learning plan or a plan for college and career readiness for each student at the school site.
2. As used in this section, "plan for college and career readiness" means a plan developed by a student and the student's parent or guardian, in consultation with school counselors, teachers, and administrators that:
 - a. is initiated at the beginning of grade 7;
 - b. identifies a student's skills and objectives;
 - c. maps out a strategy to guide a student's course selection; and
 - d. links a student to post-secondary options, including higher education and careers.
3. The policies shall include guidelines and expectations for:
 - a. recognizing the student's accomplishments, strengths, and progress toward meeting student achievement standards as defined in the core standards for Utah public schools;
 - b. planning, monitoring, and managing education and career development; and
 - c. involving students, parents, and school personnel in preparing and implementing an individual learning plan and a plan for college and career readiness.

Additionally, the plan is updated annually for secondary students (grades 7-12) and is to include graduation requirements, measures of workplace skill competencies, identification of post-secondary goals, and an approved sequence of courses. Individual learning plans are used in the elementary grades with teacher-student-parent conferences focusing on meeting appropriate benchmarks.

In Utah, there is flexibility and choice at the school level, but learning plan meetings are mandated at least once each year. Legislation requires students to be present at meetings (instead of just the teacher and parent, and when students get older, the meetings become student-led).

Importantly, state higher education, K-12 education, and workforce sectors partnered to create a Utah-specific career information system, called [Utah Futures](#) that provides a one-stop shop for information to support individual college- and career-readiness plans.

For support under the comprehensive guidance program, counselors and teachers use a state-wide curriculum with lesson plans and instructional supports to provide guidance to students in a systemic way. Schools receiving comprehensive guidance program funds must participate in on-site reviews conducted every six years by the state office of education (internal reviews are done every three years) and schools must report annually to patrons on learning plan activities.

Colorado Case Study

Colorado's legislation mandating *Individual Career and Academic Plans (ICAP)* was passed in 2009. High schools were required to develop learning plan processes for students in grades 9-12. In 2013, the plans were incorporated into new graduation requirements at the recommendations of a working group. The [state's guidance](#) describes a meaningful plan as one that results in students who:

- Connect the relevance of education to future aspirations
- Are more motivated to attend school and stay engaged
- Become confident learners who can actively set goals
- Make secondary and postsecondary course plans to pursue career and life goals
- Are able to articulate their transferable skills and apply knowledge about how their actions today connect with their goals

The pilot implementation in Denver schools focused on students in sixth and ninth grades. Many of the requirements were met by teachers working within advisory periods or homerooms. As the work progressed, the Director of Counseling created sample modules to share with teachers in all grades. Students use Schoology to create portfolios of work and Naviance to access plan requirements such as career interest surveys. Plans must be transferable among schools and districts and be approved by post-secondary institutions (ECS, 2017).

Principals were observed to have a key role in the fidelity of implementation. Principals invested in the concepts of personalized instruction built and supported formal structures for career and academic plans to be incorporated into daily practice. Staff noted that completing tasks in a web-based platform can lead to an emphasis on compliance but it does help the district to understand which schools are engaged and which need additional supports.

In Denver, central office staff describes the plans as “a process” that should expose students to different careers, options, and chances. New competency-based graduation requirements are being incorporated for the class of 2021 and beyond. Denver educators are working to use the career capstone piece of ICAP to help students demonstrate career readiness. A future option is to allow students with IEPs to replace a resource class with a career and academic plan class so they too can participate in building portfolios.

Vermont Case Study

Vermont continues its implementation of *Flexible Pathways to Graduation*, a label enshrined in the 2009 Act 44, but enacted in Act 77 of 2013. By school year 2018-19, all students in grades 7 to 12 were to have access to personalized learning plans. The state evidenced strong popular governmental and public support for offering personalized learning plans that guide students through differentiated learning opportunities. With education agencies under local control, the state outlined what a learning plan with multiple pathways might look like, but avoided prescriptiveness in its guidance to schools. Over time, implementation lagged as learning plans became de facto checklists for school leaders. The groundswell of popular support for learning plans began to wane.

The Vermont Agency of Education shifted its approach to implementation to reinvigorate popular support, generate school buy-in, and build staff capacity. Beginning with a listening tour, the state sought to understand unique local needs from across the state. They introduced guidance that identifies essential elements for learning plans. Said an Agency of Education leader, “If we know that student agency, relationships, assessments, and proficiency progression are important, then they should be part of the personalized learning plan.” They additionally offer schools a readiness checklist (Vermont Agency of

Education, 2017) and exemplar versions of learning plans to schools with guidance and challenges on how these plans were integrated into classrooms.

The next phase of implementation focuses on building a data and evaluation process. A forthcoming publication of a school climate survey includes questions on the development and use of personalized learning plans, the use of flexible pathways, and how personalized learning plans support flexible pathways. The same Agency of Education leader recommends building a system for data collection at the outset of implementation.

Rhode Island Case Study

The Rhode Island School Counselor Association led the effort to include student-directed *Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)* in the 2008 Regents' Secondary Regulations. Though ILPs were mandated for schools to offer students in grades 6 to 12, implementation was left as a local decision. Since the state lacked a system to monitor and evaluate ILPs, their form and use varied widely. Revised regulations were passed in 2016 to give structure to state expectations of schools. Thereafter, a working group would draft ILP framework and guidance documents, students would meet with an educator to discuss the ILP biannually and at key transition points, and the state would approve a list of online learning plan vendors along with guiding curricula for their use. Said one state leader, "Our districts and schools appreciated the opportunity to co-develop the expectations. We created a single platform with a menu of options for districts and schools to choose their best fit. They have to meet state expectations but have options on ways to do that."

The ILP serves as tool that supports academic relevance and readiness. Learning plans are a check that learning is relevant to individual students and support student agency by engaging them in the process of planning their education pathways. Beginning in sixth grade, students' ILPs guide them through academic and career pathways with customized learning opportunities, exposure to postsecondary readiness, and opportunities to map college, career, and personal/social goals. Students may additionally participate in a Pathway Endorsement, a demonstration of learning in a key academic area based on courses in one content area, engagement in related career activities, and demonstration of proficiency. As Rhode Island is moving toward proficiency-based education, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) is shifting the narrative of a learning plan from a compliance check to "a rigorous backbone to that process."

Rhode Island is working with states and districts to adopt the new tools. They expect all regulations to be up and running by 2021. Currently, an [Individual Learning Plan Adoption Toolkit](#) is available online to support schools in decision-making and implementation of the ILP menu of options. RIDE is focusing on district-by-district professional development and vendor selection and training. During the 2018-19 school year, RIDE convened a professional learning group for schools to share best practices to support quality, integrated implementation. RIDE is also working to strengthen their relationship with the state's School Counselor Association to develop capacity and buy-in.

RIDE leaders now consistently identify Individual Learning Plans as a mechanism to building coherence across school efforts for college and career preparedness. "Student planning and coordination, pathway options, course choice options, work-based learning opportunities is always an opportunity to talk about ILP as a centralized backbone."

Agency Comments

October 23, 2018

Kathleen Patterson
District of Columbia Auditor
717 14th Street NW, Suite 900
Washington, DC, 20005

Dear Ms. Patterson,

Thank you for the opportunity to review and respond to your recommendations for personalized learning. We appreciated this work both for its thoughtfulness and because we feel it is reflective of the implementation challenges regarding personalized learning.

DCPS is committed to ensuring that every school guarantees students reach their full potential through rigorous and joyful learning experiences provided in a nurturing environment. To meet this mission, we aim to provide an inclusive academic and social emotional learning experience that ensures all students are college and career ready.

DCPS agrees that personalizing learning and individualized planning are effective instructional practices toward accelerating student outcomes. At the same time, we appreciate that the report notes that personalized learning plans can be a heavy lift and are at times based on limited research. To that end, we will work to ensure that personalized learning plans are targeted around a clear problem. While we are interested in exploring ways to start learning plans in the elementary and middle grades, DCPS is investing first in developing a solid foundation at the high school level.

As referenced in the report, we are excited about the personalized graduation and postsecondary plans rolling out to all high school students this spring. This resource was developed based on research-based evidence and student and family feedback. Please find attached an example of this approach: *A Student Future Map*. We appreciate EdCORE taking the time to learn about this initiative and would be happy to share lessons learned and outcomes as we move forward.

DCPS is well-positioned to implement personalized learning plans because we have the ability to ensure consistency across schools and avoid overlapping initiatives. For example, we can leverage Cornerstones and LEAP, our innovative curriculum and professional development programs, to provide supports for teachers and schools. We also believe there is an opportunity for future efforts to focus on meeting the needs of our students with disabilities by building a strong connection between personalized learning plans and Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

We know this must be a continued conversation. DCPS' goal is to empower our teachers and school leaders to meet the needs of all students and we believe personalized learning plans are one tool that can support this commitment. Again, thank you for the opportunity to respond to your work.

Sincerely,



Amanda Alexander
Interim Chancellor



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Your Counselor

James Orras
11871@dc.org
(202) 422-5026

College and Career Coordinator

Emily Young
emyou@dc.org
(202) 123-5026

Letter from DC Public Schools

Claudia Marquez

10th Grade Guide
ID# 101

-
SAT

870
PSAT

0
Community Service
Hours

3.01
Weighted GPA

CLAUDIA'S HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION PROGRESS

You are on track to graduate in 7 subject areas and off-track in 3 areas. There are still opportunities to get fully on-track to graduate.

Please view page 6 for additional resources and commended next steps.



GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS		1 Year	2 Years	3 Years	4 Years	HERE'S WHAT IT MEANS
	Math					ON TRACK in Math for graduation. Pass your classes to remain on-track.
	Visual/ Performing Arts					ON TRACK in Visual/Performing Arts for graduation. Pass your classes to remain on-track.
	Science					ON TRACK in Science for graduation. Pass your classes to remain on-track.
	College Level/Career Prep					ON TRACK in College Level/Career Prep for graduation. Pass your classes to remain on-track.
	Social Studies					ON TRACK in Social Studies for graduation. Pass your classes to remain on-track.
	Electives					ON TRACK in Electives for graduation. Pass your classes to remain on-track.
	English					NOT ON TRACK YET in English for graduation. Schedule time to meet with your counselor.
	Foreign Language					ON TRACK in Foreign Language for graduation. Pass your classes to remain on-track. Many colleges require three to four consecutive years of the same college.
	Physical Education/ Health					NOT ON TRACK YET in Physical Education/Health for graduation. Schedule time to meet with your counselor.
	Community Service					NOT ON TRACK YET in Community Service for graduation. Schedule time to meet with your counselor.
LEGEND		Must Take	Enrolled	Course Passed		

CLAUDIA'S COLLEGE READINESS GUIDE

Claudia, based on your GPA and PSAT/SAT, below you will see your chance of admission at various area colleges and universities.

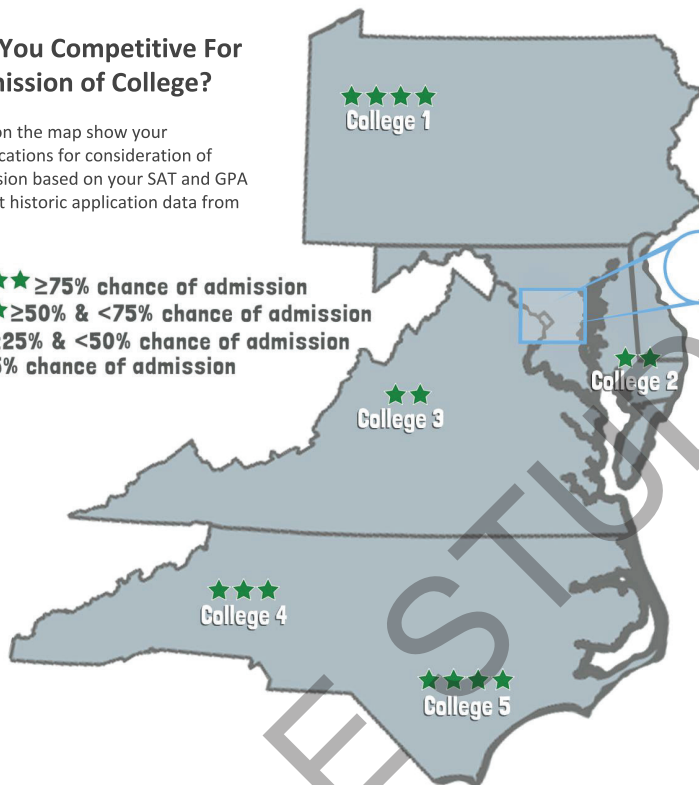
There are also other factors that might contribute to college admission. See page 6 for some action steps to improve your likelihood of admission.



Are You Competitive For Admission of College?

Stars on the map show your qualifications for consideration of admission based on your SAT and GPA against historic application data from DCPS.

- ★★★★★ ≥75% chance of admission
- ★★★★ ≥50% & <75% chance of admission
- ★★★ ≥25% & <50% chance of admission
- ★ <25% chance of admission



PUBLIC COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

A public college or university is publicly owned or receives significant public funds through a national or substantial government. DC TAG helps to offset the cost of tuition at public colleges and universities (two-year and four-year) by providing DC residents grants of up to \$10,000 toward the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition at colleges and universities throughout the US, Guam and Puerto Rico and \$2,500 per academic year toward tuition at private colleges in the Washington, DC Metropolitan area and private Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) nationwide. Go to <https://osse.dc.gov/dctag> to learn more about DC TAG and how to apply.

To be competitive for admission, you must complete the required college-prep courses, and have both a strong GPA and strong SAT/ACT scores.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

There are many community colleges in the DC area offering two- and four-year degrees for undergraduates. **Each campus and program usually has an open-door admissions policy, so all students are eligible to enroll.**

PRIVATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

A private college or university is an independent school that sets its own policies and goals, and is privately funded. Private colleges and universities rely mainly on tuition, fees and private sources of funding. Although the cost of a private school is higher than public schools, these schools often offer generous financial aid packages to undergrads who demonstrate financial need.

DOLLARS4COLLEGE NEWSLETTER

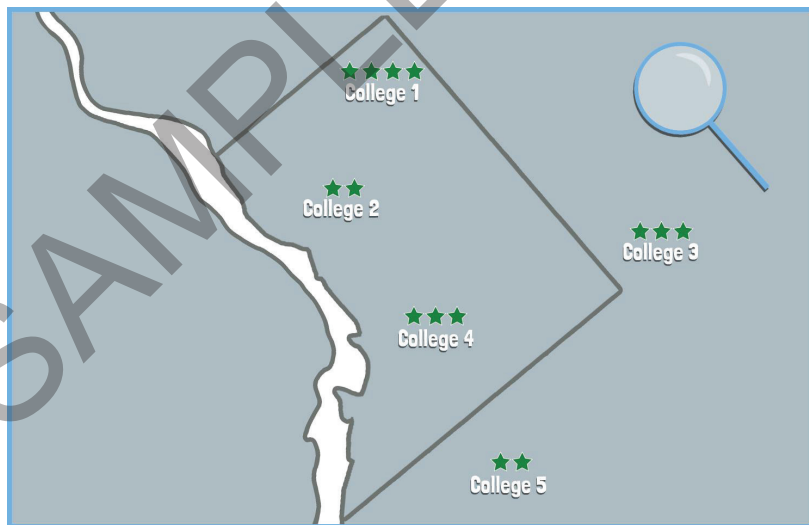
Go to <https://goo.gl/forms/MBE2INyQ2XvViqTx1> and sign up for "Dollars4College Newsletter" to learn about scholarship opportunities.

NAVIANCE

Make sure to access your [Naviance](#) account for college exploration, application, and much more.

Your User ID: Student ID number

Your Password: mmddyyyy



Claudia Marquez

10th Grade Guide

ID# 101

-
SAT870
PSAT0
Community Service
Hours3.01
Weighted GPA**CLAUDIA'S CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA METRO**

Based on the postsecondary survey, you 3 career choices are Architecture & Construction with more than 60,300 yearly job openings, Information Technology with more than 90,700 yearly job openings, and Law, Public Safety, Corrections & Security with more than 50,100 job openings.

**CAREER INTEREST**YOUR #1 CAREER CHOICE ON YOUR SURVEY WAS: **Architecture & Construction**

	HS Diploma		Associate's Degree		Bachelor's Degree		Master's Degree or Higher	
Sample Jobs	Carpenters	Construction Laborers	Engineering Technicians	HVAC & Refrigeration Mechanics & Installers	Architects	Construction Managers	Engineering Managers	Landscape Architects
Hourly Wage	\$24.60	\$18.69	\$34.02	\$26.40	\$39.27	\$38.66	\$74.01	\$41.01
Median Annual Income for the Industry	\$49,546		\$66,664		\$85,405		\$134,118	
Colleges to Consider	Evergreen State College Alamance Community College		Evergreen State College Alamance Community College		Gonzaga University Seattle University		Gonzaga University Seattle University	
Degrees & Certificates to Consider	Certificate in Architectural Design, Drafting, Metal Fabrication, Architecture Technology		Transfer Degree Architecture, Architect. Design, AS Draft & Design		Bachelors of Architecture, BA of Architecture, Environmental Design, Landscape Architecture		Masters of Architecture, Interior Arch., Building Science, Heritage Conservation, Landscape Architecture	

YOUR #2 CAREER CHOICE ON YOUR SURVEY WAS: **Information Technology**

	HS Diploma		Associate's Degree		Bachelor's Degree		Master's Degree or Higher	
Sample Jobs	Entry-Level Programmers	Computer User Support Specialists	Computer Network Support Specialists	Web Developers	Computer Network Architects	Systems Software Developers	Engineering Managers	Computer & Information Systems Managers
Hourly Wage	\$28.41	\$26.55	\$33.61	\$32.41	\$57.61	\$57.00	\$74.01	\$70.73
Median Annual Income for the Industry	\$54,038		\$68,661		\$108,701		\$150,530	
Colleges to Consider	Evergreen State College Alamance Community College		Evergreen State College Alamance Community College		Gonzaga University Seattle University		Gonzaga University Seattle University	
Degrees & Certificates to Consider	Certificates Web Development, Computer Tech., Database Mgmt, Computer Security & Networking		AA in Web Development, Computer Technology, Database Management, Computer Security and Networking		BA in Computer Engineering, Computer Science, Computer Science and Engineering		Masters in Computer Science	

Claudia Marquez

10th Grade Guide

ID# 101

-
SAT870
PSAT0
Community Service
Hours3.01
Weighted GPA**CLAUDIA'S CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA METRO**

Below you'll find information on your additional career cluster and CTE progress.

Combining academic and technical skills, CTE courses prepare students for current and emerging professional career opportunities.

**CAREER INTEREST (CONTINUED)**

YOUR #3 CAREER CHOICE ON YOUR SURVEY WAS: **Law, Public Safety, Corrections & Security**

	HS Diploma		Associate's Degree		Bachelor's Degree		Master's Degree or Higher	
Sample Jobs	Lifeguards	Security Guards	Fire Fighters	Correctional Officers & Jailers	Detectives & Criminal Investigators	Forensic Science Technicians	Fire Fighting & Prevention Supervisors/Managers	Lawyers
Hourly Wage	\$17.06	\$12.08	\$37.26	\$29.06	\$57.05	\$45.22	\$71.69	\$71.55
Median Annual Income for the Industry	\$63,149		\$68,973		\$75,213		\$148,970	
Colleges to Consider	Evergreen State College Alamance Community College		Evergreen State College Alamance Community College		Gonzaga University Seattle University		Gonzaga University Seattle University	
Degrees & Certificates to Consider	Certificate in Fire Science, Administration of Justice, Legal Secretary, Law Enforcement		Transfer Admin of Justice, AA Security Mgmt, Legal Secretary, Court Reporting, Corrections, Forensics		Bachelors in Criminology and Criminal Justice		Masters in Criminology and Criminal Justice, Masters of Law, S.J.D.	

CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Below is find information on your progress in your Career Academy. Combining academic and technical skills, CTE courses prepare students for current and emerging professional career opportunities.

Introduction	Concentration	Capstone	Status
			CTE classes link course content to real-life work experience. Your pathway has 3 CTE levels. You are enrolled in your concentration CTE course. The capstone course for your pathway is Plant Biotechnology 3. See your counselor for any questions.

CLAUDIA'S NEXT STEPS

You are not on-track yet to graduate.

Below you'll find resources and recommended action steps to get back on-track and achieve your goals.



☐ Set Goals for the SAT/ACT, GPA and Careers

Work backwards from where you want to be in 10 years. What do you need to do now to get there?

collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/
www.act.org

☐ Look for Internships

Internships are a great way to gain experience in a field of interest. Colleges and future employers like seeing internships in your record. Talk to your school's college and career counselor for information about possible internship opportunities.

☐ Review Your Schedule

Analyze your schedule in relation to the required courses for graduation.

☐ Participate in extracurricular activities

Colleges take note of extracurricular activities such as student government, athletics, and performing arts.

☐ Review PSAT and Use Khan Academy

Link your PSAT scores to Khan Academy and get free online test preparation customized to areas where you need help.

www.khanacademy.org

☐ Revisit Career Planning

It's natural for your thinking about careers to evolve. Maybe try another online career tool.

☐ Apply for Financial Aid

Complete FAFSA (Free Application for Financial Aid). It is required by all colleges available October 1st and due March 2.

fafsa.ed.gov

☐ Check Email Frequently

Ask teachers, counselors or coaches who know you well. Ask early. Give them your resume and a paragraph on why you like each college.

☐ See Your Counselor If You Need Help

Again, if you need any assistance with all of these activities, go to your school counselor. You are not alone!

Postsecondary Pathway	Social Emotional Learning Goal	Academic Goal
Apprenticeship	Spend more time with my brothers and sisters.	Earn a B in English class.



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF

EDUCATION

October 31, 2018

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL ONLY

Ms. Kathleen Patterson
District of Columbia Auditor
Office of the District of Columbia Auditor
717 14th Street, NW, Suite 900
Washington DC 20005

Re: Draft Report entitled, "Personalized Learning Plans in DC: Options for a Pilot Project".

Dear Ms. Patterson:

This correspondence serves as the Office of the State Superintendent of Education's (OSSE) response to the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor (ODCA) draft report, *Personalized Learning Plans in DC: Options for a Pilot Project* (Draft Report), dated September, 2018.

OSSE serves a unique role in sustaining, accelerating, and deepening the progress being made in DC education. OSSE was pleased to participate in the State Board of Education's Graduation Taskforce. The taskforce recommended that OSSE takes steps to require a personalized learning plan for each public school student in the District that must be revisited in elementary, middle, and high school to ensure the student is on track to graduate. The Taskforce's recommendation was to implement this initially through a pilot.

OSSE appreciates ODCA and EdCore's work in developing this report and making recommendations as to how pilots could be executed. It is clear that there is already significant work being conducted by schools across the District which will contribute to the knowledge base and best practices across Washington, DC. OSSE does not anticipate amending the regulations governing the graduation requirements at this time to specifically include personalized learning plans. However, we are supportive of the diverse array of programs addressing personalized learning plans across DCPS and charter schools, many of which are reflective of the communities that they serve and will only serve to strengthen and improve opportunities for student learning.

Sincerely,

Hanseul Kang
State Superintendent
Office of the State Superintendent

CC:

Betsy Cavendish, General Counsel, Executive Office of the Mayor
Paul Kihn, Acting Deputy Mayor of Education



Scott D. Pearson
Executive Director

October 17, 2018

Kathy Patterson
Auditor of the District of Columbia
Washington, DC

Dear Ms. Patterson,

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the report
Personalized Learning Plans in DC: Options for a Pilot Project.

The report is an excellent resource for any organization considering personalized learning plans (PLPs). It summarizes well the approaches being taken around the country towards implementing PLPs and the nascent research findings around this topic. The report clearly explains the varied objectives PLP are used for, from a college-and-career planning tool to an early warning indicator for students who are off-track to a vehicle for introducing more personalized learning environments at all ages.

While taking a national perspective, the report is admirably grounded in the unique context of the DC educational landscape, specifically the presence of 67 independent local education agencies (LEAs) located within our 68 square mile district. And the report recognizes the reality that our educators are at times overwhelmed with initiatives. We welcome the report's practical recommendations, specifically to start with a pilot, to engage actively with implementers, and to work with a "coalition of the willing". We agree that this approach "increases the odds of long-term success and sustainability."

In this regard, we appreciate that the report recognizes that "plans that share core elements could vary across schools in the other elements included, by school or district choice." Our many LEAs will inevitably take different approaches to PLPs. This diversity is a source of strength and will increase the odds of finding effective approaches. For this reason we appreciate the flexible approach envisioned by the report's authors.

The report presumes that PLPs will be stored centrally so that they are accessible by school personnel when students move schools and for other reasons. We appreciate the value of this approach but advise caution. Any common system needs to be designed in a way so as not to constrain individual LEAs as they design PLPs appropriately suited for that school's pedagogical approach and student body. And, because PLPs will contain much confidential information, appropriate safeguards and permissions need

to be built into the system, including the requirement for parental consent before PLPs are shared outside of the child's school.

The approach of working with interested LEAs is also consistent with the recommendations of the State Board of Education (SBOE) task force. The task force report states that "the DC Public Charter School Board (PCSB) would oversee plans for [public charter] schools *that opt to create them*." (Emphasis added.) We expect that most high schools will embrace PLPs of some sort. Indeed, many already do, as is highlighted in the report. But some LEAs may elect to take a different course and we would appreciate it if the report, at page 3, would clarify the opt-in nature of the SBOE recommendations.

The report, at page 9, describes the use of 9th grade on-track indicators as an example of one use of PLPs. We would be grateful if the report noted that the DC Public Charter School Board has incorporated 9th grade on-track as a component of its School Quality Reports evaluation tool for high schools since these reports were launched in 2011. We would note that 9th grade on-track is not currently an element of the new OSSE STAR rating system. Perhaps this should be a topic for further discussion.

Of the pilot approaches suggested we are most enthusiastic about those that build on work already under way, such as the Bridge to High School Data Exchange. We also note that the SBOE Task Force included no representation from elementary or middle schools. Therefore a pilot focused on high school or the bridge to high school would likely stand on firmer ground.

Thank you for the excellent work done by DC EdCORE and the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor to help advance this promising practice.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'SP', with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

Scott Pearson



October 23, 2018

Kathleen Patterson
District of Columbia Auditor
Office of the District of Columbia Auditor
717 14th St. NW, 9th Floor
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Ms. Patterson,

The State Board of Education (SBOE) appreciates the opportunity to review and provide comments on the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor (ODCA) draft research report prepared by the Education Consortium On Research and Education (EdCORE) titled *Personalized Learning Plans in DC: Options for a Pilot Project*.

In May 2018, the State Board unanimously passed the recommendations of its High School Graduation Requirements Task Force. One of the recommendations focused on creating personalized learning plans for every public-school student in the District to be revisited at three critical transition points during elementary, middle, and high school. The recommendation called for personalized learning plans to also include a list of home-based interventions and to be overseen by the respective sector (i.e. DCPS or the DC Public Charter School Board). The Task Force suggested that this recommendation be implemented in both traditional public and public charter schools in school year 2019–20 for students in grades 2–4. The Task Force further recommended that personalized learning plans should be expanded to all grades over the 2020–21, 2021–22, and 2022–23 school years.¹

The EdCORE draft research report draws attention to issues raised by the Task Force. Researchers clearly considered and reviewed the recommendations of the Task Force, as they discussed personalized learning plans and proposed six potential options for how personalized learning plans could be implemented in the District.

Below, SBOE has outlined areas of strength and concern on the draft research report. Thank you in advance for considering SBOE’s comments.

- **Defining personalized learning plans** – SBOE appreciates the draft report’s analysis on the three categories of purpose in which the implementation of learning plans traditionally falls (i.e. tracking student progress towards graduation, supporting college and career exploration, informing personalized learning approaches). Additionally, the draft report’s effort to clarify, better define, and outline the research on student learning plans was helpful in understanding the breadth and depth of work that has been done to date. SBOE believes that these three purposes reflect the discussions of the Task Force; however, would like to reiterate the Task Force envisioned personalized learning plans as

¹ https://sboe.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/sboe/page_content/attachments/Final%20Recommendations%20HS%20Graduation%20Requirements%20Task%20Force.pdf



tools to ensure students are “on track to graduate”. On previous research, the information provided on the percentage of U.S. high schools using learning plans (i.e. 65 percent) and the notes of limited analysis and robust research on the impacts of learning plans were helpful.

- **Intentional and purposeful during implementation** – SBOE recognizes that the implementation of personalized learning plans in the District will take a significant amount of resources—personnel, financial, infrastructure, and time. As such, the draft report’s language around ensuring that first decisions include all relevant stakeholders, are deliberate and inclusive, and articulate the goals and purpose for learning plan use is commended. Highlighting that learning plan developers must be specific about the problems to be solved and tasks to be accomplished in order to design learning plans that are effective is also appreciated. Furthermore, addressing the lengthy implementation timelines of other states (e.g. Vermont) was helpful when considering the amount of work on which the District is about to embark.
- **Recognition of previous and existing work** – The previous and existing District-based initiatives around monitoring student progress highlight the District’s ongoing ability to implement school reform and improvement strategies. SBOE sees value in these initiatives, especially the DCPS High School Student Future Map, and looks forward to understanding how they could be integrated and/or used alongside a personalized learning plan program in the District.
- **Pilot program options** – SBOE appreciates Options 2–6, which follow the suggested timeline of the Task Force and have an implementation start date of fall 2019.
 - Option 2 is largely what the Task Force recommended and would help the District understand the broader needs of a specific student population—likely at a feeder pattern of schools in a single LEA.
 - Options 3 and 4 provide unique approaches to understanding keep aspects of the overall personalized learning plan recommendations of the Task Force. Under Option 3, a focus on a single grade would give the District insight into a larger number of schools and allow the District to focus on the specific aspects and indicators needed for a particular student population and grade level. Option 4 is a two-year pilot that gives the District an opportunity to understand a key piece of the Task Force’s recommendation (the grade-level transitions piece); however, this option might also be limited in scope like Option 2.
 - Options 5 and 6 use existing frameworks and efforts to help understand the backbone of what a District-wide personalized learning plan program could look like. SBOE sees value in leveraging existing infrastructure and knowledge to understand how learning plans could be established. SBOE would also like to reiterate that the Task Force recommendations explicitly state that personalized



learning plans would not supplant individualized education programs (IEPs), but serve as an addendum.

- Option 1, although appealing in its deliberate, thoughtful, and cautious nature, seems to prolong the implementation of personalized learning plans in the District. SBOE agrees that there are a set of common steps that must occur, prior to implementation of a pilot program; however, SBOE believes this can be accomplished sooner than Option 1 suggests.

As ODCA finalizes the collection of comments from other agencies on its draft research report titled *Personalized Learning Plans in DC: Options for a Pilot Project*, SBOE welcomes any additional or clarifying questions. SBOE is fully committed to working alongside you and your staff as this draft report is released in the coming weeks.

Sincerely,



Karen Williams
Ward 7 Representative and President
District of Columbia State Board of Education



EDUCATION CONSORTIUM FOR RESEARCH AND EVALUATION (EdCORE)

EdCORE was established to serve the District of Columbia school system as a go-to research and analysis partner. The consortium is a partnership of experts from locally based and nationally prominent organizations, working together to inform public education policy and planning in DC. Current partners include the Graduate School of Education and Human Development at the George Washington University, American Institutes for Research, and Policy Studies Associates.

AUTHORS

Elizabeth Grant, Visiting Associate Professor of Education, The George Washington University

Autem Clay, Doctoral Student, GW Educational Leadership and Administration Program

Aubrey DeBoer, Master's Alumnus, GW Education Policy Program

Laura Groth, Doctoral Student, GW Education Policy Program

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Office of the District of Columbia Auditor

717 14th Street N.W.

Suite 900

Washington, DC 20005

Call us: 202-727-3600

Email us: odca.mail@dc.gov

Tweet us: https://twitter.com/ODCA_DC

Visit us: www.dcauditor.org



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Thank you.

